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PREPUBLICATION VERSION

Knowing what we know about knowledge in social work: The search for a comprehensive model of knowledge production¹

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Abstract

Influenced by its historical beginnings, the production and modelling of knowledge in social work has become a small, but diverse field. Ten key models exploring the nature of knowledge and its production in social work are reviewed against significant ideas from the interdisciplinary knowledge production literature beyond social work. In so doing, the place of holistic approaches to modelling the knowledge production process within social work and the human services is highlighted. It is argued that, despite the number of models that attempt to describe the knowledge production process, there is scope for a more comprehensive, holistic, complex approach to modelling knowledge production in social work and the human services.

In the late 1970s, Mark Philp wrote a seminal piece on forms of knowledge in social work where he attempted to show how social work emerged from broader discourse on poverty alleviation. It was an inherently individualistic discourse constructed around notions of individual choice consistent with broader liberal views of the individual. Social work and its role in society were defined initially by charity and philanthropy, which subsequently gave way to the influence of social policy and institutionalised welfare. As industrialisation grew,

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so too did welfare as a social right aimed at the prevention of social breakdown. This structural context provided the framework in which social work developed, making it possible for social workers – as individuals or in professional groups – to speak ‘about a particular issue or object ... [in which] there is a structure to knowledge ... which exists over and above the individuals who operate within its boundaries’ (Philp, 1979, p. 85). Social work knowledge came to be seen as a social product influenced by social conflicts and dominant interests arising within a given society.

What, then, asks Philp (1979), ‘characterises social work knowledge: how does its product differ from these other forms of knowledge; what is social work’s regime of truth?’ (p. 89) For him, social work knowledge is paradoxical because ‘it attempts to remain in the form of objective knowledge, [yet] this objectivity is uncertain in the extreme because what it presents is a picture of the subject’ (p. 91). The objective aspects relate to the system of academic constraints in which social work education and practice is embedded and the way in which it has developed historically with an integral notion of the value of scientific activity. Thus it produces objective knowledge of subjectivity: ‘Rather than producing a subject *qua* individual [as an author might do in literature], the social worker creates a subject who is characterised by a universal subjectivity, one which applies to all individuals and yet no one in particular’ (Philp, 1979, p. 91). To do so, it draws heavily on other disciplines, including existential psychology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and anthropological philosophy. It is the latter that contributes an in-built belief in the good of humanity:

Concern with moral issues is an inherent element of human nature derived from the fact of man’s (sic) rationality and his ability to reflect upon himself in relation to his past, present and future ... Human nature is thus the most significant material with which the social worker is engaged – his own nature and that of others (Philp, 1979, p. 92).

The form of subjectivity created in dealing with human nature in this way is similar to the Kantian moral imperative, that is, the dictum of 'become what you essentially are' (see Gray, 2011 for a discussion of how this philosophical perspective develops into the strengths perspective in social work). Thus 'social work emphatically embraces subjectivity and regards itself as a carrier of the human tradition of compassion' (Pearson, in Philp, 1979, p. 92), focusing on 'common human needs' (Towle, 1965, p. vii). While social work has an ambivalent relationship with determinism (see Peile, 1993), the subject of social work is marked by an in-built 'capacity for self-determination, responsible citizenship, and general sociability' (Philp, 1979, p. 92). The community, too, 'is represented in terms of its possibilities for autonomous, self-respecting functioning; it is seen to have inner resources with which to develop so that it can organise effectively enough to take part in normal political processes' (pp. 99–100). Any theory that posits forces beyond the individual's control is then either ignored or subverted by social work's regime of truth and 'social work theory produces a picture of the individual who is at once subjective and social' (p. 93). Its dominant ideology 'stresses human potential and sociability' (p. 97) so 'it must produce theories of human potential and sociability' (p. 98). Thus says Goldstein (1990), the heritage of social work's commitments:

Is the recognition that we are, at the root of things, social beings existing with one another in a state of symbiosis, interdependence, and community. On reflection, this philosophical and also practical understanding of the social context of the human state might have served as the substratum or wellspring of the profession's knowledge structure (p. 33).

The social worker serves as a mediator, speaking for or on behalf of clients – or serving as the voice of the client – putting forward his or her best side, the part that has the potential to be a good person. In this way, 'the social worker cannot help but try to create people,

subjects, where everyone else is seeing cold, hard, objective fact' (Philp, 1979, p. 99). The worker 'speaks for' (p. 102) the anonymous subject which he or she has created. These then are the boundaries within which social workers operate as they represent minority interests and views. Social workers champion those whom society marginalises. This led inevitably to anti-oppressive practice and empowerment approaches in social work drawing on critical theory during the 1970s and 1980s (Gray & Webb, 2013).

This discussion of knowledge production in social work draws on a systematic review of the international literature on knowledge production and transfer that was undertaken in two stages: (i) a review of the general literature on knowledge production and a (ii) targeted review of literature on social work and the human services.

The New Production of Knowledge by Gibbons et al. (1994, see also Nowotny et al., 2004) was used as a starting point for the compilation of search terms. The literature search covered all reputable literature – books, journal articles, theses, reports, online publications, and so on – on the broad subject of *Knowledge Production*. The search encompassed EBSCO MegaFile Premier, Informit Social Sciences, Proquest, Scopus Health Sciences and Social Sciences, Web of Science, Wiley InterScience, the Library of Congress, and the National Library of Australia. In the search, the term 'knowledge production' and its synonyms and relatives 'knowledge transfer', 'knowledge diffusion', 'knowledge mediation', 'knowledge economy', 'knowledge development' and 'knowledge society' were combined with the terms 'mode 1', 'mode 2', 'triple helix', 'interdisciplinary\$', 'transdisciplinary\$' and 'multidisciplinary\$' (through the Boolean operator AND).

Most of the located literature stemmed from the fields of management (and economics), higher education and research policy, and science and technology. The articles on the 'triple helix' approach came exclusively from these disciplines (with some articles additionally having a social science and technology angle), whereas literature on the Gibbons et al.'s

model also came from the fields of social and information science, philosophy, healthcare and healthcare policy, and sociology but only to a limited extent. There were no articles in the social work discipline using the aforementioned terms in their titles. On the other hand, many publications in the field of higher education and research policy contain general deliberations on the role of universities and academia deemed significant to all disciplines, including social work. It is striking that for both knowledge production models, the number of publications has increased since the year 2000, with a slump for the ‘triple helix’ model between 2003 and 2005.² A total of 243 journal articles was located in the general search of the literature on knowledge production producing 188 papers of varying relevance to the present study. All of the located literature was recorded in an endnote database, allowing the data to be searched according to a variety of categories, such as author, source, keywords, and date of publication. Each literature item was recorded in the database with its bibliographical data, keywords, and (in most cases) an abstract. The literature identified in the initial search (n=315, including books) was divided into three broad categories:

1. Those which were easily accessible via the electronic databases available through the University of Newcastle Library (n=188).
2. The hard copy texts (the majority of which The University of Newcastle library did not hold) (n=38).
3. The remaining journal articles and publications that were sought from library sources external to the University of Newcastle (n=89).

The review of the literature commenced with Category 1 where each piece of literature was examined using the following process by two reviewers using a consistent format involving:

1. Author’s affiliation and disciplinary background identified.

² Publications for 2009 were not always accessible yet through the employed databases. This explains the slump for 2009.

2. Aim or purpose of the work identified.
3. Important quotations identified.
4. Summary of key issues and reviewer's thoughts about the article notated.
5. Each item rated in terms of relevance to this study on a scale of 1 to 5+ where one was of least relevance or importance and 5+ of most relevance or importance by one of the two research assistants conducting the review of the literature.

All publications in the Swedish language (n=7) were given to a third reviewer, whose third language is Swedish to review and translate material relevant to the study³.

At the completion of reviewing the Category 1 literature, the two primary reviewers examined the literature for emerging themes and relevance to the human services and drew together the key themes in the reviewed literature. It was identified at this stage that there was a scarcity of literature directly related to social work and the human services. It was decided at this point to limit pursuing a broad review and proceed with a more targeted review for material directly related to the human services.

The literature was studied and a master resource list compiled (n=188 see (1) above) rating the resources collected on a scale between 1 and 5+, with five being highly relevant. The literature was summarised according to its purpose, key content, and contribution.

³ Public Inquiries of the State (2008). *Evidensbaserad praktik inom socialtjänsten – till nytta för brukaren: Betänkande av Utredningen för en kunskapsbaserad socialtjänst*. Stockholm, Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2008. [Evidence-based Practice within Human Services – for the Benefit of the User: Reflections on the Inquiry into Knowledge-based Human Services]. Stockholm: Public Inquiries of the State 2008.)

Socialstyrelsen (Sverige) (2004). *För en kunskapsbaserad socialtjänst: Redovisning av ett regeringsuppdrag åren 2001-2003, slutrapport* [For Evidence-based Social Services: Report on a Government Mandate 2001-2003, Final Report]. Socialstyrelse (The Swedish equivalent of the Board of National Health and Welfare).

Socialstyrelsen (Sverige) (2003). *Brukarmedverkan i socialtjänstens kunskapsutveckling*. [User Participation in Human Service Knowledge Development]. Socialstyrelse (The Swedish equivalent of the Board of National Health and Welfare).

Socialstyrelsen (Sverige) (2002). *Utvärdering av FoU: En studie av FoU-enheter inriktade på individ- och familjeomsorg* [Evaluation of Research and Development: A Study of Research and Development Entities Concentrating on Individual and Family Care]. Socialstyrelse (The Swedish equivalent of the Board of National Health and Welfare).

Varg, N. (ed.) (2003). *Perspektiv på kunskapsutveckling inom socialtjänsten: en antologi*. [Perspective on Knowledge Development in the Human Services: An Anthology]. Socialstyrelse (The Swedish equivalent of the Board of National Health and Welfare).

In the first search, only six of the 243 articles located dealt with knowledge production in or for the human services⁴ and, of those, only two engaged with Gibbons et al.'s (1994) model, the focal point for study.

We were aware that there was a body of material within the social work literature base that may be relevant to this study that had not been identified within the initial searches focused on knowledge production. Thus, it was considered important to conduct a second, targeted search that focused on knowledge in the human services and social work. The second literature search again covered all reputable literature – books, journal articles, theses, reports, online publications, and so on – the focus of this search was on *knowledge in the human services and social work*. The following were searched: Ovid Technologies: Social Work Abstracts, PubMed (Medline), Google Scholar (relevant items from the first fifty (50) pages from each search were included), The University of Newcastle Library Catalogue, The British Journal of Social Work and subsequent hand searching based on potentially relevant material located by all members of the research team. In the search, the terms were limited to ‘human services’, ‘social work’, were combined with the terms ‘knowledge production,’ and ‘knowledge’ (through the Boolean operator AND).

The literature identified in the targeted search (n=655) was reviewed for relevance. Exclusions (n=530) from this initial sweep of the literature included any duplicate material across all searches, literature not directly related to the research process, and all general knowledge production literature that did not add something new to the review process already

⁴ Gabbay, J., Le May, A., Jefferson, H., Webb, D., Lovelock, R., Powell, J., et al. (2003). A case study of knowledge management in multi-agency consumer-informed ‘Communities of Practice’: Implications for evidence-based policy development in health and social services. *Health*, 7(3), 283–310; Gredig, D., & Sommerfeld, P. (2008). New proposals for generating and exploiting solution-oriented knowledge. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18(4), 292–300; Herie, M., & Martin, G. W. (2002). Knowledge diffusion in social work: A new approach to bridging the gap. *Social Work*, 47(1), 85–95; Kjørstad, M. (2008). Opening the black box – mobilising practical knowledge in social research: Methodological reflections based on a study of social work practice. *Qualitative Social Work*, 7(2), 143–161; Proctor, E.K., & Rosen, A. (2008). From knowledge production to implementation: Research challenges and imperatives. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 18(4), 285–291; and Waghid, Y. (2002). Knowledge Production and Higher Education Transformation in South Africa: Towards Reflexivity in University Teaching, Research and Community Service. *Higher Education*, 43(4), 457–488.

undertaken returned through the University of Newcastle Library Catalogue search that was not specifically relevant to social work and the human services. This process ensured the most relevant material was reviewed (n=125). All but one of the items identified were readily available via the electronic databases accessible through the University of Newcastle Library or via interlibrary loans (n=124).

The review of the literature commenced by examining each piece of literature according to the same process and format used for the initial search but conducted by a single reviewer. A further literature set (n=244) was identified via hand searching for papers and books identified as potentially relevant from the initial literature by all members of the research team as the literature review was completed examining:

1. Core journals in the field.
2. Journals in other fields that may deal with similar problems – follow the connections.
3. Works Cited or Bibliography at the end of seminal articles or books.
4. Serendipity – wandering through the real and online ‘stacks’.

All social work and human service oriented papers, which included models of knowledge production (n= 10), were examined for content and are discussed within this paper. Each model was evaluated by two members of the research team against a set of criteria, which were drawn from the broader knowledge production literature highlighting key features that distinguished Mode 2 from Mode 1 knowledge production approaches (Gray & Schubert, 2012). These criteria are evident in Table 1. Debates about forms or classifications of social work knowledge continue to reflect the wide array of disciplines from which it is drawn making it an interdisciplinary profession. This was captured in the notion of social work as a generalist rather than a specialist profession.

Table 1: Comparing ten models of knowledge production in social work

Features	Rothman and Thomas (1994)	Humphreys (2003)	Karvinen-Niinikoski (2005)	Gould (2006)	Flaskas (2007)
Addressed research context	Practice context examined within the human services	✕	Context considered in terms of the implications of a managerialist environment	Specifically focused on mental health social work and considers organisational knowledge	Located within the therapeutic field of psychoanalysis and systemic therapy
Mode of addressing the production process of knowledge	Views knowledge production as embedded in the research process that is strongly linked to practice	Knowledge production is conceived as a triangular relationship between research, practitioner wisdom, and service-user perspectives on practice	Knowledge is considered within a two-dimensional quadrant	Knowledge is considered within a two-dimensional quadrant	Knowledge production process is viewed as a lop-sided spiral where practice generates theory that informs and shapes practice which challenges the limits of theory, the theory is extended, and developed that informs practice which, in turn, challenges theory
Considers evidence-based practice (EBP)	Focused on empirical research rather than EBP per se	EBP considered within the managerialist context. Concluded that while research evidence was important, a 'tripartite' approach, juxtaposing research with practice expertise and user views was preferred	EBP only considered in terms of its influence upon expertise.	Valued randomised control trials (RCTs) as well as service-user generated knowledge, considering the inclusion of the latter as broader than EBP	EBP discussed in terms of promoting accountability despite being in the early stages of researching 'actual' practice or providing useful therapeutic comparisons. Notes that EBP has reinforced individual diagnostic practices across all levels of mental health services, consequently individualising services
Considers Mode 1 knowledge production	✕	✕	✕	Implied in RCT discussion but not called Mode 1	✕
Considers Mode 2 knowledge production	✕	✕	Linked to – and claims consistency with – the ideas of Nowotny (2000) but does not explicitly discuss Mode 2 (Nowotny et al., 2004)	✕	✕

Considers knowledge translation	✖	✖	✖	✖	✖
Considers organisational context	Human services setting considered but not the organisational mechanics	Clearly considered the organisational context of knowledge production	Saw knowledge production as context dependent	Clearly considered the organisational context of knowledge production	Considered the context of the therapeutic relationship, social work, and broader society but not the organisation
Considers knowledge utilisation	Saw practice application as central to knowledge use and drew clear links between knowledge development and utilisation	Considered service users and relevance of research to them as important but little focus on the mechanics of utilisation	Minor discussion of use was linked to dissemination	Mentioned in relation to the drivers of knowledge production	Looked at the use of systemic and psychoanalytic knowledges as part of a case study
Considers organisational change	✖	Recognised the development of links between research and practice as a complex, incremental process of organisational change and development	✖	Minimal reference only in relation to policy change	✖
Other key factors	Focused on innovation	✖	✖	Inclusive and non-hierarchical	Linked to Nonaka (1994) and considered wider social context
Strengths	Earliest model, strongly linked to practice	Appreciated the complexity of knowledge and the place of organisational change in the knowledge process	Examined the influence of varying levels of expertise and focused on different kinds of knowledge	Relevance to mental health and strong focus on methodology and analysis	Strong links to social work's ethical base and focus on well-being
Limitations	Focus limited to new interventions	Not formalised as a model and links not made to potential models	Simplistic and does not examine contextual issues to any significant depth but implies their importance	Simplistic	Limited to therapeutic sphere

Features	Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008)	Robinson et al. (2008)	Payne and Aga Askeland (2008)	Trevithick (2008)	Alexanderson et al. (2009)
Addressed research context	Considers broad social context but not specifically the research context	Considers health and community contexts	Positions knowledge production within the context of international social work and globalisation	Discusses the context of practice rather than research	Refers to the social services sector
Mode of addressing the production process of knowledge	Viewed knowledge as produced through hybrid cycles	Model determined by the combination of six 'P's of knowledge: public, practitioner, press, policy-maker, private sector, and patient	Knowledge includes formal research, scholarship, professional and life experiences (including tacit knowledge) with scientific knowledge providing a lens for organisation and validation	Viewed knowledge as overlapping and interweaving, incorporated theoretical, factual and practice aspects. Process consisted of acquisition, practice knowledge, creation and use	Threefold model incorporated research-based-practitioner, embedded research and organisational excellence models
Considers evidence-based practice (EBP)	Significant discussion on EBP leads the authors to jettison the notion of knowledge transfer and extend the boundaries to a field or space for action	Evidence-based resources examined and utilised as part of developing innovative interventions	Discussed within the context of valid knowledge	Concern expressed regarding the rule-based application of EBPs	EBP and research and development viewed as a framework in which a variety research and development roles are played the local settings focused on strengthening and encouraging EBP
Considers Mode 1 knowledge production	Discusses science but not named as Mode 1	✖	✖	✖	✖
Considers Mode 2 knowledge production	Model developed on the new mode of knowledge production but there is little discussion of Mode 2 per se	Examined Mode 2 as a conceptual framework	✖	✖	✖
Considers knowledge translation	Critiques the transfer model of knowledge, preferring a process for the generation of knowledge for action	Considers knowledge transfer only	Discusses the transfer of learning and the context of transfer	Discusses the transferability of knowledge but not its translation	Refers to knowledge translation theories but does not expand with a discussion of same

Considers organisational context	The professional organisation and culture considered	Community and international context considered, but no focus on organisational context	Considers the impact of postmodernism on practitioners, students, and educators within organisations	✖	Focuses on the learning organisation
Considers knowledge utilisation	Minor focus on knowledge use	Discussed as an aim of the project but little discussion beyond this	✖	Strong focus on relevance and usability (form)	Utilisation in partnership within the organisation is examined and discussed in terms of organisational excellence
Considers organisational change	The model is influenced by organisational structure rather than focused on change within an organisation	Discusses change in relation to policy, practice, and health outcomes but not the organisation specifically	Discussed in terms of inequalities, oppression, discrimination, and the limitations of managerialism	✖	Acknowledged as a factor but not explored
Other key factors	Considers the difference between novices and experts	Strong community orientation and advocates knowledge be internationally tested	Focuses on social justice issues	Knowledge viewed as complex, interweaving, and is of various kinds including service-user and carer knowledge	✖
Strengths	Incorporates client knowledge, linked to information theory, and provides a complex model embedded within social and political context	Multi-country testing and a strong focus on networks	Identifies the biases of knowledge and addresses the importance of cultural knowledges and social justice	Maps the social work knowledge base and considers its nature, including personal, collegial, and service-user forms with strong focus on acquisition and natural sources of knowledge	Relevance to social services
Limitations	Separates and then reunites academic and practice knowledge through hybridised knowledge cycles	No evidence of change with health outcomes had been identified at the time of writing	Stronger focus on social work education and practice than on knowledge production	Doesn't consider the broader knowledge production processes	Limited to research and development unit focus

Tensions continue as to whether social work is essentially a humanistic, value-based, knowledge-guided or research-based profession. Overwhelmingly, social work has sought to develop a core of knowledge from diverse disciplinary sources and to fashion it into a form useable in an integrated, holistic, generalist approach to practice pulled together by its social justice values and social mission.

Relative to professions like law and medicine, social work's level of engagement in the production and use of a distinctive social work knowledge base is low; little formal professional knowledge is produced in social work (Eraut, in Horder, 2007; Flaskas, 2007; Trevithick, 2008, 2012). This lack of internal knowledge production might be explained by confusion about social work's identity. As Trevithick (2008) argued, there is uncertainty regarding what constitutes the '*knowledge base of social work*' (p. 1212, original emphasis) and how it can be applied to practice. She noted the problematic, interchangeable way in which the terms knowledge and theory were used within the social work literature. Payne and Aga Askeland (2008) believed that the confusion was related to the different purposes towards which knowledge in social work was put. For example, knowledge for social reform was different to knowledge for personal change. These views contrast with those of Mäntysaari (2005) who viewed professional practice in tandem with education and research. He argued that 'realism' had the potential to act as a foundation for social work knowledge, as it overcame the dangers of relativism, inductivism, and empiricism (see Stepney, 2012).

The emergence of information and communication technology and data-related approaches to knowledge has resulted in further changes to the forms of knowledge within social work leading to a move away from narrative ways of thinking and operating to data-based approaches. Parton (2008) suggested that changes in the nature of social work and the relationship between theory and practice had been brought about as a result of the increased operation of social work in the 'informational' (p. 253) mode of production.

Alexanderson, et al. (2009) believed that the concept of knowledge must be understood in the broadest terms to ensure that professionals and their work were rendered more visible. They viewed knowledge as a synthesis of research and practice. Marsh (in Horder, 2007) saw the problem of knowledge within social work as related to the value placed on 'relational knowledge' (p. 1082), especially knowledge from colleagues over other forms of knowledge.

Trevithick (2008) expresses concern over the location of research largely in academic contexts, the inaccessibility of academically produced knowledge, and the absence of the practitioner's voice. She sees a need for '*practitioner-generated knowledge*' (p. 1230 original emphasis) noting that practitioners' interpretive or creative use of knowledge in practice is itself 'a minor act of knowledge creation' (Eraut, in Trevithick, 2008, p. 1230). This gap between research and practice increases 'confusion about the relationship between knowledge and research' (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1233). The dilemmas she raises apply equally to the linear-transfer model of evidence-based practice though she concluded that the lack of research use in practice did not mean that the work lacked a knowledge base. Practitioners use diverse forms of knowledge, including common sense (Trevithick, 2008, 2012), practice wisdom (Dybicz, 2004; O'Sullivan, 2005; Tsang, 2008), and tacit (Imre, 1984; Osmond, 2006; Zeira & Rosen, 2000) and process knowledge (Sheppard, 1998; Sheppard, Newstead, Di Caccavo, & Ryan, 2000; Sheppard & Ryan, 2003; White, 1997). However, these discussions in the social work literature do not focus only on knowledge generated through research and Trevithick (2008, 2012) is not alone in appealing for practitioner-generated knowledge (Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook, & Rossiter, 2000; Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 2000; Napier & Fook, 2000; Wade & Newman, 2007). Indeed, the contribution of social work to discourse on the use of research generally amounts to reiterating that social workers should use research to inform their practice, and to argue for the importance of other forms of knowledge for practice (Gray, Plath & Webb, 2009; Ife, 2007).

Trevithick (2008, 2012) attempted to untangle the confusion surrounding forms of knowledge by suggesting social workers use theory to explain or convey their understanding of a specific situation or problem but acquiring knowledge is a more complex enterprise than theorising due to the need to gather, analyse, and synthesise a variety of theories to build an understanding or position. Further, she cautioned that in some situations ‘understanding – or *knowing about something* – can mean that the ability to put that knowledge into action – *knowing how* – can easily be ignored as a key area of knowledge and overshadowed by more scientific and abstract forms’ (Trevithick, 2008, p. 1214). However, the development of knowledge is more than an individual enterprise or the collective undertaking of a group of individuals. The building of knowledge, as the knowledge production literature shows, is a systematic process with in-built quality assessment systems, as well as public accountability measures. This does not mean that a space does not exist for ‘openness to alternative perspectives, and a willingness to rethink the processes, roles, and relationships that define the predominant approaches to social work’ (Finn & Jacobson, 2003, pp. 73–74) but these processes are formative and do not occur in a vacuum or only in the context of dialogical professional relationships (Finn & Jacobson, 2003). They are shaped by broader professional debates on epistemology, methodology, theory, and social relevance as well as political, sociocultural, and economic trends, such as economic globalisation, advances in information and communication technologies, and human rights discourses to name a few. Knowledge production literature beyond social work appeals for the importance of contextualised knowledge. However, as Finn and Jacobson (2003) note, questions of whose knowledge counts in particular contexts engage issues of power that continually preoccupy critical social theorists. For example, Hick (1997) advocates a particular philosophical stance for transformative research, where the production of knowledge addresses ‘injustice, exploitation, violence, and environmental degradation’ (p. 75).

Clearly, different knowledge traditions result in competing claims as to the value, authority, or utility of various forms of knowledge. This is why Habermas (1972) talked about the need for knowledge to serve a variety of human interests and purposes. Different forms of knowledge are needed for different purposes: empirical-analytical knowledge is needed to answer scientific problems; historical-hermeneutical knowledge is needed to explain human experience and search for meaning; while critically reflective knowledge is needed for self-examination. In this vein, Pawson et al.'s (2003) system of knowledge classification included 'policy, organizational, research, practitioner and user, challenging conventional hierarchies of knowledge, by suggesting that each of these has value, though their availability as product differs greatly' (in Horder, 2007, p. 1082) but they found that there was no existing framework that covered all social care knowledge.

Social work has also been significantly influenced by the work of Schön (1983), which led to a heavy emphasis on critical reflection and the social worker's attempt to make sense of their actions or understand the situations of and their encounters with clients. This places the onus on social workers to use their subjective, reflective skills to interpret and judge the relevance, reliability, and weight of competing knowledge claims in particular situations or in relation to specific problems (Doherty & White, 2012; Sheppard, 1998; Sheppard et al., 2000; Taylor & White, 2000, 2006; White, 1997). More recently, claims for greater reflexivity have entreated social workers – practitioners and researchers – to develop greater awareness of their impact on the situations, people, or phenomena with which they are dealing (Sheppard, 1998; Sheppard et al., 2000; Taylor & White, 2000, 2001; White, 2008).

Finally, drawing on a linear-transfer model, Sin (2008) noted the importance of being aware of the varying 'cultures of knowledge production and use' (p. 95) and believed that a wide range of techniques was required to move evidence into practice and policy across these diverse cultures. Thus, from the outset, knowledge in social work is contested. There seems to

be little agreement between the various positions beyond an acknowledged degree of complexity and confusion. Consequently, discerning what constitutes an adequate knowledge base for social work remains a complex and difficult task (Gray & Schubert, 2012; Taylor & White, 2006; Trevithick, 2008, 2012).

Knowledge production in social work

Discussions of knowledge production are a recent development within social work and the human services and there are several discernible themes within this literature:

1. The incorporation of diverse but related approaches to knowledge production.
2. A move toward evidence-based practice
3. A proliferation of knowledge production models

We focus here on the approaches to knowledge production and models that have emerged as a consequence. Those writing specifically about knowledge production include Denvall (2006), Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008), Kjørstad (2008), Marsh and Fisher (2008), Payne and Aga Askeland (2008), and Trevithick (2008, 2012). Denvall (2006) noted that knowledge production within Scandinavian social work was also described in terms of lifelong professional learning and decision-making involving service users.

There is a consistent theme in the social work literature on the value of practice-based knowledge where professional action is seen to be guided by a form of knowledge different from scientific knowledge: ‘The specific nature of this form of knowledge is its hybrid character [and its] guidance for practical action’ (Gredig & Sommerfeld, 2008, p. 293). Thus different approaches to practice intervention result in differing approaches to knowledge and *vice versa*. These differing approaches can be grouped into two broad categories: (i) participatory action research approaches deriving from a critical perspective, which emphasise the importance of cooperative processes in the development of applied knowledge,

for example community-based, service-oriented, collaborative and participatory approaches to knowledge production, and the context within which knowledge is produced; and (ii) evidence-based practice wherein scientific approaches to knowledge production are valued.

While there is a strong focus on practice, as well as informing interventions, knowledge in social work and the human services seeks to contribute to making and influencing social policy (Walters, 2003). Policy and decision-makers' perceptions of credible, reputable, and relevant research are a determining factor in its influence. But even here, though cooperative processes of knowledge production are seen as important, a linear notion of policy transfer is presumed. For example, Trocmé et al. (n.d.) believe partnerships involving decision-makers and researchers, which employed broad evidentiary sources, are more likely to shape policy agendas where the movement of evidence into policy and practice requires 'multi-level and long-term strategies that go far beyond traditional dissemination' (p. 2). The limitations of traditional dissemination approaches were highlighted by Walters (2003) who suggested their weak impact on practice and policy, especially where government partnerships might limit researcher autonomy and exert pressure to produce knowledge supporting 'official policies and practices' (p. 3). At the same time, researchers are required to be more 'commercially and market driven' (Walters, 2003, p. 3) and 'policy relevant' (Tombs, in Walters, 2003, p. 75).

These regulative knowledge politics in the human services involve new coalitions between researchers, policy-makers, and senior practitioners shaped by a narrow utilitarian evidence-based policy agenda concerned with 'what works' and 'what counts'. Tombs (in Walters, 2003) found 'what counts' with policy makers is 'the control of information, the need to render the control invisible, and short term policy making' (p. 75). Policy-makers in government need 'generative knowledge' to draw upon as strategically required. But, rather than a simple transfer process, political bargaining, bureaucratic decisions, strategic priorities,

efficiency measures, and economic incentives enhance the political palatability of research more than its relevance, methodology, or objectivity (Tombs, in Walters, 2003). The ability of commissioned research to influence policy is as much about timing and political appeal as it is about quality, content, and rigour (Walters, 2003). When government contracts provide guidelines regarding the nature and type of the research conducted, the outcome is an ‘administrative exercise’ (Walters, 2003, p. 142). This is consistent with Howe’s (1996) view that social work is ‘analytically ... shallow and increasingly performance-oriented’ (p. 77). Yet increasing pressure on researchers to attract research funding and produce quality publications influences their decisions to accept restrictive government contracts and affects the kind of knowledge produced. It is against this political backdrop that discussions on knowledge production must take place. Within this context, researchers’ and professionals’ perspectives on knowledge production vary greatly and have spawned diverse models to explain the processes involved.

Proliferating models of knowledge production in social work

Most of the models of knowledge production identified in the human services and social work literature presume a linear model of knowledge production and transfer (development, dissemination, and utilisation). However, there is little consistency or congruence between the various models. Some focus on the nature or type of knowledge produced, and others on aspects of the knowledge production process. In Table 1 ten key knowledge production models are noted in chronological order and critiqued against a set of significant ideas drawn from the interdisciplinary literature on knowledge production beyond social work, which contributes to the understanding of knowledge and its production (see also Gray & Schubert, 2012). Table 1 clearly shows that none of the identified models provides a comprehensive holistic approach incorporating all aspects of the research process indicated as necessary in

the work of Philp (1979). An analysis of the models in Table 1 led to the identification of a number of important considerations about knowledge production models in social work to which we now turn.

Only two models referred to Gibbons et al. (1994) or their *new* theory of knowledge production. However neither provided an extensive discussion of the conceptual basis of the model, or the relevance of Mode 2, said to promote socially relevant, collaborative knowledge. While the new theory of knowledge production provided the basis for the development of Gredig and Sommerfeld's (2008) model of knowledge production in social work, they offered minimal discussion of the modes of knowledge production or their implications in their work. In contrast, Robinson et al. (2008) specifically examined the Mode 2 conceptual framework as the basis for their study and subsequent modelling.

The majority of the models, including Rothman and Thomas (1994), Karinen-Niinkoski (2005), Gould (2006), Flaskas (2007), Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008) and Robinson et al. (2008), attended to the context in which research was conducted but the focus was frequently narrow. Here the broader research context and its related sociopolitical and policy drivers, including funding processes and sources of research were not considered. Instead, these authors focused mainly on the practice context in which the research was either conducted or used.

The majority of the models considered the importance of the organisational context. While this was done from diverse perspectives, it seems to reflect the emphasis placed on the relevance of the research to the organisation under discussion. For example, Gould (2006) and Humphreys et al. (2003) clearly articulated the importance of the organisational context to their understanding of research. In unique contrast, Karvinen-Niinkoski (2005) viewed knowledge production as highly context dependent. This diverges from Alexanderson et al. (2009) who discussed the concept of the learning organisation and its relationship to research.

There was also substantial variation regarding the place of organisational change. This ranged from an absence of any discussion (Flaskas, 2007; Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2005; Rothman & Thomas, 1994; Trevithick, 2008) to being considered integral to the knowledge production process (Humphreys et al., 2003). There was limited focus across the models on the processes of organisational change required to move knowledge from research to use in practice, with Humphreys et al. (2003) providing the most extensive account of the complexity of this arena. Beyond these models there is growing interest in social work regarding the movement of knowledge to practice as it relates to change within organisational contexts. Analysis in this arena is beginning to identify important knowledge-related behaviours for change. For example, Gabbay et al. (2003) identified the privileging, acceptance, processing, transforming, and internalising of knowledge along with the influence of changing organisational agendas as important for the uptake and use of knowledge within the organisational context.

There was little focus in most of the models on knowledge translation, that is, translating knowledge into a form that can be used by practitioners. The only reference to this process was evident in the work of Alexanderson et al. (2009), who mention theories of knowledge translation. However, they did not engage in a discussion of the concepts in any depth despite the significance of knowledge translation within the interdisciplinary knowledge production literature.

There was general agreement across the models that there was a place for the consideration of knowledge utilisation within the production process but emphasis on and importance of knowledge use varied widely across the models. Rothman and Thomas (1994) and later Trevithick (2008, 2012) emphasised practice application as central to knowledge use and consequently drew clear, practice-oriented links between knowledge development and its utilisation in their models. Utilisation in partnership within the organisation has also been

examined and discussed as necessary for organisational excellence (Alexanderson et al., 2009).

A number of the models discussed the place of evidence-based practice but none examined how it related to Mode 1 – science and discipline-based – and Mode 2 – collaborative, interdisciplinary – forms of knowledge production (Gray & Schubert, 2012). Humphreys et al. (2003) consider evidence-based practice within the context of managerialism and conclude that, while research is important, they favoured a ‘tripartite’ (p. 43) approach which juxtaposed research with user perspectives and practice expertise. Their approach contrasts with that of Flaskas (2007) who, despite viewing evidence-based practice as still being in the early stages of examining ‘actual’ (p. 135) practice or providing useful therapeutic comparisons, discussed it as a useful means of promoting accountability. Flaskas (2007) also expressed caution regarding the way in which evidence-based practice reinforced individualistic diagnostic practices in mental health. Trevithick (2003) expressed a similar concern about the rigid application of evidence-based practice. These cautions notwithstanding, Gredig and Sommerfeld (2008) examined evidence-based practice at some length and, as a result, abandoned the linear notion of knowledge transfer, instead developing the more encompassing notion of a complex field or space for action involving cooperative knowledge production.

There is little consistency in the diagrammatic nature of the models presented, which range from simple two-dimensional (four quadrant) models (Lymbery, in Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2005; Gould, 2006) to more complex, layered one (Robinson et al., 2007; Rothman & Thomas, 1994). Overall, these diagrams tend to simplify and minimise the complexity of the knowledge production process in its entirety. A number of the models had a narrow focus and explored a particular (singular) practice domain, for example Gould’s (2006) model focuses specifically on mental health and Flaskas (2007) locates her work in the

context of psychoanalysis and systemic therapy. Gould (2006), Humphreys et al. (2003), and Trevithick (2008) all identified the importance of user, service-user, or carer knowledge within the knowledge production process, while importantly, Flaskas (2007) flagged the importance of considering social work's ethical obligations within the knowledge production process.

Conclusion

The analysis of models against significant factors in knowledge production processes in diverse disciplines, considered against the historical developments of knowledge within social work, highlights the importance of holistic approaches to modelling knowledge production within social work. For such models to encapsulate the process of producing knowledge within social work, as many key elements as possible consistent with wider multidisciplinary understandings of knowledge production must be incorporated. In our view, the linear models, which are dominant in the social work literature, are highly simplified and need to be extended, at a minimum, to incorporate the factors affecting the context in which knowledge is produced and used (Gray & Schubert, 2012). This inclusion will enable social workers to consider a more comprehensive range of factors which influence research and its use in practice and, as a consequence, may improve the articulation of the processes required to move research to practice, and give social work a more competitive edge within research funding arenas. Articulation of the processes through which research flows to influence practice within a unified framework would consolidate the research outputs of the discipline under one umbrella while highlighting the different forms of research within that canon. Such a consolidation would potentially contribute to moving social work from the disciplinary margins toward the mainstream.

There is a requirement to bridge the context in which knowledge is produced – the research context, where a major factor is the research environment and broader policies driving research – and that in which it will be used – the practice context, where organisational culture, specifically human service organisations' capacity to embrace new knowledge is pivotal. The creation of such a bridge is a strategic development which would assist social workers (both researchers and practitioners) in locating where a particular piece of research lies within the catalogue of knowledge produced across the discipline and consider and promote its trajectory into practice. Without a strong knowledge production model that attends to the multifarious modes of research that social work undertakes the view of social work research remains partial and limited. Such a model would also allow practitioners to more comprehensively understand the diversity of social work research. It would also enable more critical consideration of the nature and value of different approaches to research in terms of the practice context by practitioners when searching for research to inform practice. Such a model would highlight the process of knowledge translation and encourage the promotion of the uptake of research into practice. This raises awareness of the need for researchers and practitioners to find ways to more effectively move research to practice and thus refine and reinforce the shape and impact that social work research has at the practice level. Such a model would also support and articulate contributions from research to the policy arena aimed at delivering relevant and efficient human services in keeping with rapidly changing global research agendas. In using elements of the knowledge production field more generally, such a model would support social workers in the human services to examine how research can best serve those with whom they work through ensuring effective social interventions within the confines of contemporary economic demands. A comprehensive model, which includes the different modes of research, opens the potential for the discipline to substantiate the degree of discipline-specific knowledge that is produced.

Thus, this analysis opens space for the creation of a more comprehensive approach to modelling knowledge production, which incorporates the profession's diverse understandings of knowledge and the processes that constitute its making. To refrain from the development of a comprehensive knowledge production model ensures the story of the research output of social work remains partial and disconnected from the ideas about the production of knowledge used by researchers in other disciplines. Further, without such a model, social work runs the risk of perpetuating the view that it is a marginal discipline without its own distinct knowledge base.

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