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An exploration of the relationship between structure and
community development practice:

Towards a Theory of
Structural Community Development

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ABSTRACT

Community Development is known as both a social practice and a professional field, often associated in Australia with the social and human services. Community development is a complex and highly contested form of practice because of the myriad theoretical positions that inform it and its applicability to diverse contexts. Its complexity also emanates from the variety of methods utilised in the work, groups of people involved and the diverse training and backgrounds of practitioners. This study can be characterised as ‘practitioner research’, that is, research arising from my experiences as a community development practitioner.

The complexity and contestation about community development’s purpose is also reflected in the literature. Propositional knowledge exists about the capacity of community development to be a vehicle through which structural disadvantage, that is, the root causes of poverty and inequality, can be alleviated. This analysis stems from structuralist theorising about social problems as arising from a specific context, not the failings of individuals. Structural theories also provide an analysis about inherent conflicts that exist in society whereby certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others. These analyses consider issues of social and economic inequality, the distribution of wealth, and the subsequent access this gives some people to political and other types of power. The purpose of this research was to explore the structural dimensions of poverty and disadvantage and how community development, as a practice, works to redress such conditions in society. The research project became a vehicle through which assumptions could be explored, challenged and a deeper understanding about practice developed.

As a practitioner within the Australian social service sector, I was aware that collective approaches to practice had lost some traction. Individual approaches to social service work had ascendancy and this, coupled with a lack of training and educational opportunities, seemed to place the field at risk of losing knowledge and skills about the practice. Further, there exists a paucity of literature in areas of theory and research, particularly empirical research exploring structural aspects of community development practice. The social and political sciences have conceptualized the notion of the structural and have provided models about social reality. Community development theorists, particularly those writing from a critical theoretical perspective, have, to a degree, provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. However, these ideas and their relationship to

community development have not been fully investigated from the perspective of practitioner-theorising, or *re-theorising*, as it takes place in practice. In summary, a theory-practice divide exists for structural community development.

The research project sought to make some progress towards rectifying this situation, that is, to gain an understanding of how concepts within the literature are being used or re-theorised in everyday practice. The research project employed an iterative approach, meaning that theory, data generation and data analysis were developed simultaneously in a dialectical process. A two-staged process of empirical investigation was employed. Stage One involved conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with twenty-two experienced Australian community development practitioners. The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise, known as consensus conferences, with practitioners who had previously been interviewed during Stage One. Their construction of reality and their way of conceptualising and giving meaning to their social world has been interpreted and analysed, providing theoretical insights about structural aspects of practice.

A core finding suggests that structural community development is underpinned by a *multi-faceted theory*. The facets include: the *structural*, that is, the analysis practitioners have about the *diverse meanings of structure*; the *act of structuring*, that is, the purposeful action undertaken, particularly as it relates to forming a base from which action is structured beyond the local level; and the *structured*, that is, the *type of structures developed* and maintained to hold community development work whilst it is in process.

The data suggests a normative model for structural community development. This model is based on three frameworks *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. This thesis posits a theory that holds an emancipatory agenda, that is, ways to redress inequality, and draws from both modernist and postmodernist theorising. It provides a useful theory for practice, one that sits alongside other models and approaches and relevant to contemporary contexts.

The thesis concludes with a discussion about the implications for further research, community development education, and processes in which practitioners can build community development praxis.

Declaration by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	XIII
LIST OF TABLES	XIV
LIST OF APPENDICES	XV
TERMS USED THROUGHOUT THIS THESIS	XVI
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 MY JOURNEY TO RESEARCH	2
1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	4
1.4 RESEARCH AIMS	5
1.5 GUIDE TO THESIS CHAPTERS	7
CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE NATURE OF ‘STRUCTURE’	12
2.1 INTRODUCTION	12
2.2 THE CONCEPT OF ‘STRUCTURE’	12
2.2.1 <i>Classical Sociological Theory</i>	14
2.2.2 <i>Structure as Conceived through Structuralism</i>	14
2.2.3 <i>Structure as Conceived through Conflict Theories</i>	15
2.2.4 <i>Structure as Symbolic Interactionism</i>	17
2.2.5 <i>Micro-Macro and Structure-Agency Integration</i>	18
2.2.6 <i>Post-structuralism</i>	19
2.3 CONCLUSION	21
CHAPTER THREE: THE CONCEPT OF STRUCTURE IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	22
3.1 INTRODUCTION	22
3.2 THEORETICAL EPOCHS AND LINKS WITH CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURAL PRACTICE	22
3.2.1 <i>The Importance of History</i>	22
3.2.2 <i>Practice Origins and Problems with Defining Practice</i>	23
3.2.3 <i>Consensus and Pluralist Approaches</i>	27
3.2.4 <i>Social Capital</i>	29
3.2.5 <i>Structural Critiques and Approaches</i>	32
3.2.5.1 <i>Critical Community Development</i>	33
3.2.5.2 <i>Networking and Structural Community Development</i>	35
3.2.6 <i>Postmodern Perspectives and Community Development</i>	36
3.2.6.1 <i>Structure and Agency</i>	38
3.2.6.2 <i>Reconceptualising Power</i>	39
3.2.7 <i>Social Democratic Reform Through Citizenship</i>	42
3.3 AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY WORK – AN OVERVIEW	45
<i>Cooperatives and Friendly Societies</i>	46
<i>Australian Social Policy and the Welfare State</i>	47
<i>The Rise of Activism and Social Reforms</i>	47
<i>New Right Politics and Their Reforms</i>	49
<i>Contemporary Contexts and Practices</i>	49
3.4 SUMMARISING THE CONCEPT OF ‘STRUCTURE’ AND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LITERATURE	53
3.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS RESEARCH	56
3.5.1 <i>Conceptual Framework</i>	57
3.6 CONCLUSION	60

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY FOR EXPLORING STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	61
4.1 INTRODUCTION	61
4.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH	61
4.3 A PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STUDY	64
4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW	67
4.5 THE METHODS	69
4.5.1 <i>Criteria for Choosing Participants</i>	69
4.5.2 <i>Sampling Processes to find Participants</i>	71
4.5.3 <i>Description of the Sample</i>	74
4.5.4 <i>Gaining Consent to Participate</i>	78
4.5.5 <i>Conducting the Stage One Interviews</i>	78
4.5.5.1 <i>Recording of the Interviews</i>	80
4.5.6 <i>Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference Groups</i>	80
4.5.6.1 <i>Meeting Agenda</i>	81
4.5.6.2 <i>Nominal Group Technique</i>	82
4.5.6.3 <i>Use of an Observer</i>	83
4.5.7 <i>Ethics</i>	84
4.5.8 <i>Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data</i>	84
4.6 THE ANALYSIS PROCESS	85
4.6.1 <i>Analysis Process of Stage One</i>	87
4.6.2 <i>The Findings Paper</i>	87
4.6.3 <i>Subsequent Analysis Process of Stages One and Two</i>	89
4.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	91
4.7.1 <i>Issues of Trustworthiness</i>	91
4.7.2 <i>Other Limitations, Delimitation and Difficulties</i>	92
4.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	93
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING PRACTITIONER’S ANALYSIS ON STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	94
5.1 INTRODUCTION	94
5.2 THE IDEA OF “STRUCTURE”	96
5.3 STRUCTURES IN SOCIETY	102
5.3.1 <i>A System of Organisational Structures</i>	103
5.3.1.1 <i>Mapping the System</i>	105
5.3.2 <i>Organisational Barriers that Restrict Practice</i>	106
5.3.3 <i>Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice</i>	107
5.3.4 <i>Community Development Groups</i>	109
5.4 POWER	110
5.4.1 <i>Power and Structures in Society</i>	112
5.4.2 <i>Analysing Power</i>	113
5.4.3 <i>Influencing Powerful Structures</i>	115
5.4.4 <i>Empowerment</i>	117
5.4.5 <i>A Structural Analysis</i>	119
5.5 AGENCY	124
5.6 STRUCTURING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK	128
5.6.1 <i>The Societal Levels at which Practice is Enacted</i>	132
5.7 CONCLUSION	135
CHAPTER SIX: EXPLORING PRACTITIONER’S METHODS FOR STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	136
6.1 INTRODUCTION	136
6.2 FOCUS OF WORK	137
6.3 THEORY-ACTION CONGRUENCY	141
6.4 STRUCTURING LOCAL LEVEL WORK	143

<i>Story #1 Political Engagement through Small Enterprise Development</i>	146
<i>Stories # 2 and 3 – Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations</i>	147
<i>Story # 4 Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action</i>	149
6.5 WORK AT BOTH LEVELS, LOCAL AND BEYOND, BUT WHERE DISTINCT CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE DELIBERATELY MADE BETWEEN THE TWO.....	151
<i>Story # 5 – Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform</i>	152
<i>Story # 6 – Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work</i>	153
<i>Story # 7 Building Regional Structure as a Vehicle to Reclaim a Developmental Agenda</i>	155
6.6 WORK AT A LOCAL LEVEL WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND WORK BEYOND THE LOCAL LEVEL DRIVEN BY PRACTITIONERS.....	158
<i>Story # 8 Regional Infrastructure to Support Local Work</i>	159
<i>Story # 9 Regional Development Work</i>	160
<i>Structuring Beyond the Local and Practitioners with High Theory-Agency Congruency</i>	163
<i>Story # 10 Networking to Hear the Perspectives of Large Numbers of People, whilst Leading from Behind</i>	164
<i>Story # 11 A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level</i>	165
6.7 CONCLUSION	168
CHAPTER SEVEN: EXPLORING PRACTITIONERS’ FRAMEWORKS OF PRACTICE FOR STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	170
7.1 INTRODUCTION	170
7.2 DEFINING AND USING FRAMEWORKS OF PRACTICE	171
7.3 STRUCTURAL CONNECTING	173
7.3.1 <i>At the Heart of Practice – Equality and Empowerment</i>	174
7.3.2 <i>Structuring for Collective Action</i>	175
7.3.3 <i>The Structural Nature of Developmental Relationships</i>	176
7.3.4 <i>Community Analysis</i>	181
7.4 STRUCTURAL SHAPING	184
7.4.1 <i>A Nuanced Understanding of Power</i>	185
7.4.2 <i>Systems-Thinking</i>	187
7.4.3 <i>Incremental Social Change</i>	189
7.5 STRUCTURAL POLITICKING	191
7.5.1 <i>Hegemony</i>	193
7.5.2 <i>Structural Practice through Advocacy</i>	194
7.5.3 <i>Structural Practice through Citizen Participation</i>	197
7.5.4 <i>Structural Practice Beyond the State</i>	200
7.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR STRUCTURAL PRACTICE	202
7.6.1 <i>Communities of Structural Practice</i>	203
7.6.2 <i>Sustaining Self for Structural Practice</i>	205
7.7 CONCLUSION	208
CHAPTER EIGHT - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A USEFUL THEORY OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	210
8.1 INTRODUCTION	210
8.2 A CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT	211
8.3 STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - A MULTI-FACETED THEORY	212
8.3.1 <i>The Structural - Diverse Meanings of Structure</i>	213
8.3.2 <i>The Act of Structuring</i>	217
8.3.3 <i>The Structured – Ways to Hold Processes Over Time</i>	221
8.3.4 <i>Holding Both the Constructivist and Normative Dimensions of a Theory Together</i>	224
8.4 A MODEL OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.....	227
8.4.1 <i>Structural Connecting</i>	228
8.4.2 <i>Structural Shaping</i>	229
8.4.3 <i>Structural Politicking</i>	230
8.4.4 <i>Theory-Action Congruency and the Three Frameworks</i>	232

8.5 THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS THEORY OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	236
8.5.1 <i>A Caveat - The Problem with a Normative Model</i>	239
8.6 THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION	241
8.6.1 <i>Theory-testing is Needed</i>	241
8.6.2 <i>Implications for Community Development Education</i>	242
8.7 CONCLUSION	243
REFERENCES.....	245
APPENDIX 1, PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	268
APPENDIX 2, INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM.....	273
APPENDIX 3, STAGE 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	276
APPENDIX 4, EXAMPLE OF STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE USED IN INTERVIEWS..	278
APPENDIX 6, PHOTO OF A CONCEPTUAL MAP	281
APPENDIX 7, FINDINGS PAPER	282
APPENDIX 8, EXAMPLE OF A TREE NODE	283

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework	59
Figure 2: Mind Map #1, The Idea of Structure.....	97
Figure 3: Mind Map #2, Structures in Society.....	103
Figure 4: Mind Map #3, Power.....	111
Figure 5: Mind Map #4, Agency	125
Figure 6: Mind Map #5, Structuring Community Development Work	130
Figure 7: Focus of Work Map	139
Figure 8: Framework No. 1 – Structural Connecting.....	173
Figure 9: Framework No. 2 – Structural Shaping	185
Figure 10: Framework No. 3 – Structural Politicking	192
Figure 11: The Three Frameworks.....	228
Figure 12: The Three Frameworks Integrated.....	237

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Criteria for Choosing Participants.....	71
Table 2: Descriptions of Participants.....	76

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet	268
Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form.....	273
Appendix 3, Stage 1 Interview Guide.....	276
Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews	278
Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups).....	279
Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map.....	281
Appendix 7, Findings Paper	282
Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node.....	283

TERMS USED THROUGHOUT THIS THESIS

The literature revealed various terms to describe the field. These range from “community development”, (see for example, Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Ledwith 2011); and “community work”, (see for example, Popple 1995; Twelvetrees 2008); to the more general terms such as, “community practice” or simply “working with communities”, (see for example, Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Weil 2005). The approach taken in this thesis is to most frequently use the term “community development”, although, terms such as those discussed above are also employed at times. This kind of interchangeability in the discussion takes place to align with how the person, for example, the author or the research participant, uses the term to describe the field.

The approach used to describe research participants in this thesis also varies. In most cases, the term “participant/s” is used to label one or more of the twenty-two community development practitioners who were interviewed for the study. However, at times, the word “practitioner/s” is conflated with the word “participant/s” to describe the people participating in this study who are also community development practitioners.

The word ‘participants’ is not to be confused with people who participate in community development activities, that is, community members or others. Occasionally, the research participants in this study referred to community members as ‘participants’ but are *not* the research participants in this study. Words used to identify these people, as distinct from the practitioners who were participants in the study, include: “citizens”, “constituent/s”, “community members” or “participants in community development processes”.

Finally, the word “workers” is conflated with the word “practitioners” and describes people who work, either voluntarily or in a paid capacity, in the field of community development.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

There are, in this period of transition, two alternatives open to us. One is that the process of development and dominance, which began with the imperialist era, is intensified ad infinitum. The open fight between innumerable competitors, clashes and conflicts among them, will lead to the utter destruction of all values, institutions, societies, polities, economies and cultures of the world. The other will bring the process of exploitation to a halt and, based on the realization of the limitations of a 'development' oriented, limited society, lead the way to an altogether new set-up....The former will be a product of the prevailing theory of development and the latter of the alternate theory of social change (Dasgupta, 1974:130).

In 1974, Dasgupta was writing about a relatively new field at the time, 'peace research', which was seeking to reorient social sciences to make them effective for human welfare. Linking three themes, peace, violence and development, Dasgupta was arguing for a "no poverty society", one that is more livable, less exploitative and less violent (1974:130).

One of Dasgupta's countrymen, Mohandas K. Gandhi, defined violence as "exploitation, centralisation of power and dominance; all that retards free expression of the weak who live at the base of society" (Dasgupta 1974:34). Gandhi's fundamental analysis was that, if he pursued the truth of the matter (known as Satyagraha – the force of truth), he would find that exploitation and dominance creates poverty. This, then, would unleash the most powerful moral, social and economic forces available to rectify oppression (Kelly, 2005). In the Gandhian tradition, the development process is based on truth, not power, as a force of liberation for the 'poorest of the poor'.

This research project can be described as travelling in the metaphorical 'wake' of this kind of analysis about social change. It holds with the view that community development is a vehicle through which people can experience liberation from oppression, in particular, experiences of oppression derived from various structures and systems in society as they impact on the lives of individuals, groups and whole communities (Mullaly 2007).

The remainder of this chapter introduces the research project. The next section is a personal narrative about my journey to research, that is, the set of circumstances that led me to undertake the research project. The third section introduces the research problem, making a case for why this type of research is needed, and arguing for new theorising about community development. The fourth section discusses the aims of the research: to develop and explore analytical, theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. It is in this section that the research questions are introduced. The fifth and final section provides a guide to the subsequent thesis chapters.

1.2 My Journey to Research

I studied Social Work at the University of Queensland in the late 1990s, and specialised in community development practice approaches. The community development approach to which I was exposed (see Lathouras 2010) was underpinned by radical theory and a structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage. The etymology of the word ‘radical’ is ‘root’, meaning that, in this context, radical theories look for the root causes of oppression and disadvantage, and seek to address them at their source (Ledwith 2011). A structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage stems from structuralist theories, specifically the conflict theories (Giddens 2009). These provide an analysis of the inherent conflicts that exist in society through which certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others (Popple & Quinney 2002). Moreover, Mullaly (2007:17) and others argue that a structural perspective views social problems as arising from a specific societal context, not the failings of individuals. This perspective considers issues of social and economic inequality, the distribution of wealth, and subsequently, people’s access to or exclusion from, political and other types of power.

The set text for my undergraduate training in community development was Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire was writing about a related but distinctly different field, that of critical pedagogy. In this, he theorised practice methodologies for literacy education. The aim of critical pedagogy is to critically re-orient students to society, and to animate their critical thinking (Brookfield 2006). Freire’s vision was that, through literacy education, men and women would see themselves as makers of culture. Through dialogical “cultural circles” (Brookfield & Holst 2010:178), a rereading of reality takes place, resulting

in the literacy learner's engagement in political practices aimed at social transformation (Freire & Macedo 1998).

As my subsequent practice in the social service sector lengthened, I was aware that, due to a range of factors, the ideas of collective approaches to practice had lost some traction. Individual approaches to social service work had ascendancy and, from my perspective, the field of community development was at risk of losing knowledge and skills about how to engage in the work. It could be suggested that the dominant trend of neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism, creates a kind of 'amnesia' resulting from ideological hegemony. If, for example, prominent individuals from disadvantaged groups have surmounted barriers, such as racism, there can be a tendency to forget that social justice is about elevating whole communities; and changing the life chances of large numbers of people, not just individuals (Healy 2005; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Mullaly 2002). Working towards social justice is one of the key principles associated with community development and social work (Bowles, Collingridge, Curry & Valentine 2006; Kenny 2011; Ife & Tesoriero 2006), and this needs to be remembered.

Using an analysis of the root cause of disadvantage, my practice moved beyond just working with groups of community members at the local level. In addition to this work, I took on roles that involved working with and for peak bodies at a state-wide level. Peak bodies claim to represent the interests of a sector, and the roles in which I engaged for the peak bodies included: neighbourhood centre network development (at regional and state levels), sector development and policy advocacy work.

For almost a decade, I put energy into this realm of practice because, at the time, I believed that working at the level of social policy formation/reformation would benefit practice conducted at the local level and, subsequently, community members. However, the positive outcomes for which I had hoped did not eventuate. Despite the collective efforts of my colleagues and myself, structural barriers that had negative impacts on people's lives persisted. Community members *were* experiencing personally transformative experiences because of their involvement in community development processes. However, other barriers to their well being, those seemingly beyond their ability to control, continued to impact negatively on their lives. I was not seeing the collective or socially transformative outcomes that some of the community development literature argues should result from practice.

Furthermore, my decision to get involved in this kind of work left me with the troublesome thought that this kind of structural work seemed to deviate from one of the normative ideas about community development, that is, working *with* communities to facilitate processes of social change. Mostly, when working at these social policy levels, community members were not involved.

1.3 The Research Problem

The previous section has discussed the practice problem I encountered – how can community development redress structural disadvantage in contemporary contexts. Community development activities can often involve very practical aims, for example, to clean up a littered park, or to develop a community vegetable garden. However, the lesson taken from Freire’s critical pedagogy showed that it is possible to undertake practice that has dual aims, a very practical aim (in Freire’s case, to learn to read), and an emancipatory aim (the politicisation of citizens). From my perspective, these *structural* implications for practice were those that needed to be problematised. The term “problematising”, Baachi (2009:xii) argues, refers to how a problem is represented from a particular standpoint, and interrogates that and other possible standpoints.

My analysis also included a lack of clarity about which community development processes or methodologies could be used to redress structural disadvantage. I was well aware of the paucity of literature in these areas of theory and research (Burkett 2001; Mowbray 1996; Popple 1995). The social and political sciences have conceptualised the notion of the structural and have provided models about social reality (see for example, Blumer 1991; Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009; Held 2006; Lefebvre, 1999 & 2002; Martin 2009; Parsons, 1991). Additionally, community development theorists, particularly those writing from a critical theoretical perspective, have, to a degree, provided an outline of what is normative about structural implications for community development (see for example, Kelly & Burkett 2005; Ledwith 2011; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Shaw 2003).

However, although these bodies of literature have grappled with the concept of structure, it is argued that these ideas and their relationship to community development have not yet been

fully investigated from the perspective of practitioner-theorising, or *re*-theorising, as it takes place in practice. Brookfield (2005) argues a theory is nothing more (or less) than a set of explanatory understandings that help one make sense of some aspect of the world and therefore, he argues, it is accurate to say that we all theorise. Theory is not the preserve of the academy alone. It is produced and abandoned, refined and discarded, through everyday conversations (Brookfield 2005). Brookfield (2005:3) cites Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who argues that each person is a theorist because she or he “participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought” (Gramsci, 1971:9). Practitioners have perspectives on structure and structural approaches to practice and these perspectives warrant exploration.

Chapter Three concludes with a section about implications for research. It is argued more fully there that a theory-practice divide exists. The argument is made that community development has not fully integrated diverse thinking around the structural into its praxis. Praxis can be described as “critical thinking and dialogue.... that seek(s) to challenge conventional explanations of everyday life while, at the same time, considering the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions” (Popple & Quinney 2002). Therefore, a more nuanced view of structure is required, one that takes into consideration existing literature and those perspectives held on structure, as well as considering structure from a practitioner-perspective. Practitioners have a unique understanding of the practical realities of working with the complexities that exist in contemporary society.

In summary, as my ideas have developed, I have seen a need to theorise a methodology of community development practice that has an emancipatory agenda, that goes beyond mere tools and techniques, and that can be a guide for practice beyond values and philosophy.

1.4 Research Aims

At the start of this chapter, Dasgupta was quoting Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) who spoke about Satyagraha – the force of truth, and that exploitation and dominance creates poverty. As a field, community development is concerned about poverty and disadvantage. I commenced this study with the assumption that practice which focuses on structural change

seeks to redress the forces of oppression causing structural disadvantage. However, Baachi's (2009) insight about how problems are represented, and how taken-for-granted assumptions, or one's ideology and beliefs, speak to and uphold one's 'truth' have modified this starting point.

By placing the deconstructing nature of critical analysis at the forefront, it is proposed that effective community development has several structural dimensions, of which structural change is one. There are a myriad of types of community development activities and processes, and many of these will be personally empowering for those who participate. However, my hunch was that the definition of structural change discussed above is only one way of conceptualising the phenomena. The research project broadened out my starting conceptual base utilising theories from a range of perspectives and contemporary critiques and also from the insights of practitioners currently practicing in the field.

Frameworks of practice assist practitioners in the conceptualisation of their work. Explicit frameworks are particularly helpful when competing discourses create complexity in the social world (Ingamells 1996) or, when practitioners seek to hold a range of theoretical perspectives together simultaneously. Ife and Tesoriero (2006:321) argue "every community worker will conceptualise practice in a different way". Moreover, practitioners will build an individual practice framework, helping them make sense of what the work is about, and this understanding changes with experience (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Frameworks, which consider structural aspects of practice, are under-theorised and warrant investigation.

This thesis therefore, aims to develop and explore theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. This aim is achieved by exploring several bodies of literature including those examining the nature of 'structure' and community development literature.

From these reviews and the identified gaps in the literature, five research questions emerged.

Research Questions:

1. How do practitioners think about structure in their work?

2. How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice?
3. What frameworks for practice emerged from the data?
4. What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?
5. What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

1.5 Guide to Thesis Chapters

To begin to achieve the aims of this research project, various bodies of literature were examined. Chapters Two and Three are a record of this task. Chapter Two explores the theoretical foundations of the study, investigating the concept of 'structure'. Structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used within a range of perspectives across the natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy and discipline-specific fields. A closer examination of the concept involved an investigation of foundational sociological theories. These provide explanations about human behaviour in society at a macro and a micro-level. A historical overview of early sociological foundations was completed, exploring 'structuralism' and its theoretical critiques, including 'conflict theories' and structure as 'symbolic interactionism'. Critiques of both macro and micro-level theories relate to their binary nature. Theorists attempting to bridge the macro-micro dilemma call for a more dialectical type of logic (Ritzer 2011). Social theories that attempt to bridge these binary positions explore both objective and subjective ontological positions. This involves debates concerning human action and social structure and the extent to which consensus and conflict are considered factors within the social world (Giddens 2009).

Chapter Three continues to explore the theoretical foundations of the study and examines the community development literature, which was found to mirror some of the theorising recorded in the sociological literature. The community development literature was examined by looking at various theoretical epochs of community development. A historical view was taken because important lessons can be learned from a critical reading of the past, not only

looking for parallels and continuities, but also recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008).

The review commences with a discussion about the problems of defining community development because of its broad applicability. It then explores consensus and pluralist approaches and the theory of social capital. This is followed by theories providing a structural critique of consensus and pluralist approaches. Postmodern perspectives and community development are then explored, followed by a further discussion on human agency and social structure as these apply to community development practice. Postmodernist theorising and its emphasis on 'power' are examined, providing analysis about the transformative elements of practice. These reconceptualisations of power potentially increase agency. The final section looks at the concept of social democratic reform through citizenship. Contemporary literature on community development and citizenship calls for a repoliticisation of people, where active citizens have a voice about the kinds of societies they wish to live in and leave for future generations.

Much of the theoretical overview is drawn from British and Australian literature, although literature from other post-industrialised countries is also used. With a history of colonisation by Britain, it is not surprising to see a number of traces or parallels between British practices of politics and community work, and our antipodean accounts. However, there are a number of points to be made that demonstrate the particularities of Australian community work and the social policy context within which it exists. Chapter Three also presents a brief overview of community development in Australia. This provides a backdrop for subsequent discussion about practice in the Australian context.

At the conclusion of these reviews the theories associated with the nature of 'structure', explored in Chapter Two, are brought together with community development theories, explored in Chapter Three. Implications for research from these reviews of literature discuss a theory-practice divide for structural community development. To a degree, the literature has provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. However, what is needed is a contribution to the literature in-situ, that is, to see how practitioners are making sense of a theory of structure in the place where practice occurs.

The chapter concludes by setting out the conceptual framework for the study, providing a “tentative theory” about what is occurring (Maxwell 2005:33). The framework explores six theoretical elements including: macro and micro theories of structure; the theory of structural disadvantage and theories for methods and approaches to ‘structuring’ the work of community development; the theories of structure and agency; and theories concerning dialectical structures.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology for exploring structural community development. It justifies an approach for this study emanating from a hybrid of two epistemological paradigms. These include a social constructionist, qualitative approach to knowledge generation, with the knowledge generated viewed through a critical theory lens. A social constructionist approach is justified because different practitioners can interpret the concepts surrounding structure and practice differently. It is acknowledged that multiple realities exist for practitioners. However, this meaning-making process was not just looking for *any* aspect of community development. It was particularly looking through a critical lens when focusing on practice as a means to redress structural disadvantage.

The study is characterised as ‘practitioner research’, that is, research carried out by practitioners for the purposes of advancing their own practice (McLeod 1999). Practitioner research provides a vehicle for practitioners to examine their practice and challenge the assumptions on which that practice is constructed (Fox, Martin and Green 2007).

To support the qualitative, practitioner-led nature of this research, processes to support inductive reasoning were employed. The study employed a two-staged research process, which first involved individual interviews and later involved consensus conference processes. The first stage involved the completion of twenty-two in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008:51) with community development practitioners. The goal of these interviews was to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of structure. The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise known as consensus conferences (Minichiello et al. 2008:161). Data analysis took several forms including the use of mind-mapping, from which a findings paper was written and disseminated to previously interviewed participants. After the conclusion of the consensus conference groups, data analysis continued using the computer software program Nvivo

(Bazeley 2007), to analyse the data more thoroughly, which subsequently led to the thesis writing process.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the research findings. Chapter Five answers the first research question: “How do practitioners think about structure in their work”? It examines the kinds of *analysis* practitioners apply when approaching their work. They analyse the circumstances of their constituents, as well as the state of affairs within society more generally, particularly those that have a bearing on how practitioners’ constituents experience their lives.

Chapter Six addresses the second research question: “How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice”? It examines the approaches practitioners believe they are taking in their work and is written in a storytelling style, where eleven stories are told to illustrate themes about how practice is being carried out.

Chapter Seven presents various frameworks of practice being utilised by participants, by merging elements from both Chapters Five and Six. It addresses two research questions: “What frameworks for practice emerged from the data? What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner’s espoused theory and their theories-in-use?” In Chapter Six, it is posited that theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) is an important concept because greater synergy between a practitioner’s espoused theories and their theories-in-use leads to more effective practice. Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either one’s espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24). Various elements of the frameworks presented in Chapter Seven are discussed in terms of their potential for greater practice effectiveness.

Chapter Eight presents a discussion based on all the previous findings chapters. It commences with a discussion about the general limitations of the study, as well as the contribution this research makes to the field of community development. It also answers the final research question: “What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?” It distills various concepts and themes found in the data, and examines these in light of previous theory found in various bodies of literature. The name of this study,

‘Towards a theory of Structural Community Development’ is apt, as this chapter is an attempt to theorise a form of emancipatory practice, one that stands alongside other theories. It is *a step* towards praxis where, in dialogue, practitioners can together further theorise effective approaches for structural community development. This chapter concludes with a discussion about the implications for further research and community development education as a result of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: Exploring the Nature of ‘Structure’

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of the study, relating to the concept of structure. The first section briefly demonstrates that structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used in everyday speech, and has particular meanings across the natural sciences, social sciences and philosophy. Following this, structure is explored in classical sociological literature, with three sub-sections examining *structuralism*, *conflict theories* and theories known as *symbolic interactionism*. Following this, sub-sections discuss social theory, which attempts to connect theories from both macro and micro perspectives, and post-structuralism. These serve as a basis for further exploration of theoretical foundations for this study. In Chapter Three, the concept of structure is explored in relation to community development literature.

2.2 The Concept of ‘Structure’

Like many other heuristics, defined by Kelly and Sewell (1988:13) as keywords that evoke particular meanings for different people, renowned French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (2002:157) states that the idea of “structure” has been highly elaborated. It has had many uses and has become confused to the point that, when people use the term, they are no longer completely sure of their focus (Lefebvre 2002). Lefebvre discusses structure in three ways, firstly as both a construct or a model, the idea of ‘becoming’; secondly as something that is given, the essence of a thing or a set of phenomena; and thirdly as a mixture of both of these (2002:171). Structure, Lefebvre adds, can also be seen as an intermediary and a mediation between forces, for example, from above or below (2002:158).

Lefebvre’s first emphasis, on structure as a construct or model, is how the concept is typically used in everyday discourse. For example, the dictionary definition of the word as a noun refers to *a structure*, the way something is built or constructed; or the way composite parts are arranged together in some way so the structure is seen from the point of view of the

complex whole rather than any single part (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). The other typical way the term or its derivations *structured* or *structuring* are used in everyday discourse is as a transient verb, for example, to give form to something, to structure one's day or to structure or organise a project (Macquarie Dictionary 2009).

These normative associations of the term and its derivations can be seen across a range of contexts, including non-social science contexts. For example, in the natural sciences, structure is associated with organic biological structures or morphology, the systemic study of the form and structure of animals and plants (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). In physical geography, structure relates to studying the physical form of lands, regions and towns (Petersen, Sack & Gabler 2012), or in chemistry, it relates to the arrangement or mode of attachment of the atoms that constitute the molecule of a substance (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). The term *structural* is also widely used in relation to macro theories such as those associated with politics and economics, often with discipline or field-specific meanings. In the field of Human Geography for example, the term structuralism is associated with theories of development (Willis 2005; see also Craig 1998; Esteva 1992; George 2004; Sachs 2005).

Lefebvre's second emphasis on structure, as something that is given or the essence of a thing or phenomena, coincides with the way the concept is used in everyday discourse as an adjective, "of, relating to, having, or characterized by structure" (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). For example, one might refer to something being structurally complex or, because of flooding, structural damage occurred to buildings.

The concept of structure becomes even more complicated when one investigates the social sciences literature and, particularly, the sociological literature. The next sub-sections look at a number of theoretical perspectives around the concept of structure from these bodies of literature. They firstly examine classical sociological literature where 'macro' and 'micro' theories are discussed: *structuralism*, *conflict theories* and *symbolic interactionism* theories. These perspectives have been included because many disciplines within the social sciences draw from foundational sociological concepts when theorising within their own discipline. Following this discussion, the next sub-section examines more contemporary theories attempting to build bridges between both the macro and micro schools of thought, or attempting to overcome the objective/subjective dualism.

2.2.1 Classical Sociological Theory

Introductory sociological texts refer to three main theoretical approaches to the study of society: “functionalism”, “the conflict approach” and “symbolic interactionism” (see for example, Giddens 2009; Henslin 2010; Willis 2004). These categories can be traced back to the work of classical or foundational theorists. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) pioneered functionalism. Karl Marx (1818-1883) wrote about a conflict approach that was later labeled Marxism. Max Weber (1864-1920) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) theorised symbolic interactionism.

These theories can be viewed as being at either a “macro” or “micro” level (Andersen & Taylor 2002; Henslin 2010). Macro level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theories, examine large-scale patterns in society, while micro level theories examine small-scale patterns of social interaction (Henslin 2010).

2.2.2 Structure as Conceived through Structuralism

Henslin (2010:18) conflates the terms “functionalism” or “functional analysis” with “structural functionalism”, although other writers refer to these various terms separately, indicating that one perspective was influenced by another, or a newer theory drew from older perspectives (see for example, Giddens 2009:79-80; Mendelson 2010:299). Nevertheless, structuralism is a term used loosely in sociology to reflect any theoretical approach that regards social structure (apparent or otherwise) as having priority over social action (Scott & Marshall 2009:738). As a macro theory, social structure is the framework of society that was already laid out for individuals before they were born (Henslin 2010). Social structure is dictated by factors such as culture, social class, and social status, the roles people enact in their daily lives or the groups to whom they belong, and these factors guide individual behaviour (Henslin 2010). Furthermore, Henslin (2010) argues that social institutions in society are another aspect of social structure affecting people’s daily lives, often beyond their ordinary awareness. Social institutions relate to factors in the background of everyday life, and Henslin defines these as: family, religion, education, the economy, medicine, politics, the law, science, the military and mass media (2010:105).

Theories of functionalism can be traced back to Durkheim's theory of "organic solidarity", which argued that society's specialised institutions must function as an integrated whole (Giddens & Duneier 2000:11). Functionalists view society much like the human body, where different components work together to maintain the overall person. In a similar way, structures in society function together, meeting the requirements of a grander scheme (Mendelson 2010). Giddens (2009) argues that structural functionalism was the dominant theoretical perspective within sociology during the 1940s, '50s and '60s and two American sociologists were particularly influential during that time, Robert Merton (1910-2003) and his mentor Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Parsonian structural functionalism gave priority to the overall system and its 'needs' and that explained theories of consensus, that is, why societies hold together and share a common morality (Giddens 2009:81). As a social theory, Giddens (2009:81) argues, structural functionalism was always vulnerable because of its over-emphasis on consensus and agreement, as well as its under-emphasis on small-scale interactional processes through which social processes are produced and reproduced. Structural functionalism is also critiqued for paying insufficient attention to fundamental conflicts in society or radical social change (Giddens 2009:81).

Structural functionalist accounts have been accused of "determinism" or "essentialism", placing too much emphasis on structural locations, for example, membership of class or status groups, which, Bottero (2010:140) argues, cannot explain the diversity of people's lives. Problematically, structural accounts tend not to acknowledge the hyper-differentiated nature of social relations and also tend to view stratification as a mold into which behaviour is poured, denying individuals freedom, choice and agency to cross stratified boundaries (Bottero 2010).

2.2.3 Structure as Conceived through Conflict Theories

Like functionalists, theorists employing conflict theories emphasise the importance of the macro structures in society (Giddens 2009). Unlike the structural functionalists who view society as a harmonious whole with parts working together, conflict theorists view society in terms of a power struggle, where groups are competing with one another for scarce resources (Heslin 2010). These theories can be traced back to Marx and his analysis of the structures of a capitalist society. Marx's "the materialist conception of history" theory holds that the main

source of social change is economic influence, not ideas or human values, as Durkheim claimed (Giddens & Duneier 2000:12). Two themes carry through all of Marx's writings, Mendelson (2010) argues, these being a critique of the dispossessing nature of capitalist society, (combined with a belief in the inherent contradictions of such an economic structure), and an individualist framework of methodology, as Marx believed that people made history, albeit often unknowingly.

With an emphasis on domination and power struggles for resources, structure in conflict theories can be related to the theory of stratification (Oberschall, 1978). Stratification in sociology is usually applied to studies of structured social inequality. It relates to the systematic inequalities that exist between groups of people, which arise as an unintended consequence of social processes and relationships (Scott & Marshall 2009). For Marx, stratification was seen in terms of social class and the exploitation of the working class. Other examples of stratification relate to gender or race (Scott & Marshall 2009), where unequal power relations and domination can be seen in terms of patriarchy, Anglocentrism or Eurocentrism.

Marxism has been highly influential in ongoing sociological debates and also in politics (Mendelson 2010). Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, more than a third of world's population lived in societies whose governments claimed to be influenced by Marxist ideas (Giddens & Duneier 2000). Furthermore, Marx's commitment to the theoretical concern for the dispossessed individual in an alienating economy retains its relevance in the modern world (Mendelson 2010).

Contemporary conflict theorists have extended their ideas beyond the relationships between capitalists and workers. However, what they have in common is the way they expose how opposing interests permeate every layer of society (Henslin 2010). Unlike Marxism, which is considered a 'grand' theory (Giddens 2009), conflict theories do not claim to present any general theory of society but emphasise coercion and power rather than consensus as the cause of social order (Scott & Marshall 2009). According to conflict theorists, inequalities exist because those in control have a disproportionate share of society's power and resources, and actively defend their advantages (Andersen & Taylor 2002). These perspectives stand in stark contrast to the third and final sociological foundational theory, symbolic interactionism.

2.2.4 Structure as Symbolic Interactionism

As a micro-sociological theory, symbolic interactionism is the lens through which symbols – things to which people attach meaning – are key to their understanding of the world and how people communicate with one another (Henslin 2010). Instead of thinking of society in terms of abstract institutions, as the structuralists do, symbolic interactionists consider immediate social interaction to be the place where “society” exists (Andersen & Taylor 2002:20). This theory can be traced back to G.H. Mead, when he claimed that language and meaning allow people to become self-conscious beings (Giddens 2009). Because people have the capacity for reflection, they interpret and develop subjective meanings of objects, events and behaviours (Andersen & Taylor 2002). Moreover, meaning is constantly modified through social interaction. People interpret one another’s behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bonds amongst people (Andersen & Taylor 2002).

Social interactionism has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and structure within society and how they serve to constrain individual action (Giddens 2009). However, Giddens (2009) argues that it is important to study everyday social interactions because these give structure and form to what people do. Giddens (2009) claims much can be learnt about people as social beings, and particularly about social life, when investigations take place into how people organise their lives, revealing the repetition of similar or contrasting patterns of behaviour. Giddens (2009:251) makes further arguments for social interactionist theorising because it reveals how humans can act creatively to shape reality in everyday life, as well as shedding light on larger systems and institutions because they too depend on patterns of everyday social interaction to exist.

To summarise this sub-section, whereas structural functionalism and conflict theories take an objective view of society, symbolic interactionism emphasises the subjective: how concepts are perceived or constructed in the minds of people and how these are altered through social interactions (Andersen & Taylor 2002). Structural functionalism notes that structures in society have primacy over the individual (Giddens 2009), that social structure is imposed. Conflict theories highlight that individuals are subordinated to society (Anderson & Taylor 2002), that social structure is a struggle for power. Finally, social interactionism argues that individuals and society are interdependent as, through collective meaning-making systems, society is created through social interaction (Anderson & Taylor 2002). In other words, from

this latter perspective, social structure is seen as a metaphor, where people interpret concepts and make sense of those interpretations individually or collectively.

2.2.5 Micro-Macro and Structure-Agency Integration

In the previous sub-sections, macrosociological and microsociological theories were discussed. The enduring dilemma for contemporary social theorists is to attempt to bridge or connect theories from both these perspectives, or in philosophical terms, bridge objective and subjective ontological positions (Mouzelis 2008).

In the late 20th Century, a movement began, largely within North America, which drew away from micro-macro extremism and toward the integration or linkage of micro and macro theories and/or levels of social analysis. Ritzer (2011) argues that the micro-macro levels of social phenomena are either objective or subjective, and social analysis must focus on the dialectical relationship among and between them.

Paralleling the growth in interest in North American sociological theory in micro-macro integrative theories, European theorists have concerned themselves with the relationship between agency and structure (Ritzer 2011:520). Although *agency* generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors, it can also refer to (macro) collectives that act, such as organized groups, organisations and nations (Ritzer 2011:521). Similarly, *structure* usually refers to large-scale social structures; however, it can also refer to microstructures such as those involved in human interaction (Ritzer 2011:521).

Giddens' structuration theory is one of the best-known and most clearly developed efforts to integrate agency and structure, with its core focus on social practices (Ritzer 2011). Introducing the concept of "the duality of structure", which is the balancing of agency and structure, Giddens (1984) alerts us to the mechanisms of social practices ordered across "space and time", which produce and reproduce structures that are the means and the outcomes of the action (Kasperson 2000:59). More simply put,

We should see social life not just as ‘society’ out there or just the product of ‘the individual’, but as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on which, at the same time, reproduce larger institutions (Giddens & Pierson 1998:76).

Giddens is concerned with the dialectical processes in which practice, structure and consciousness are produced (Ritzer 2011). Structures are both “made *and* makeable... through *structuration*, which is constantly driven by actors consciously *or* unconsciously” (Joas & Knöble 2009:289, their emphasis). Joas and Knöble (2009:297) describe Giddens as an “anti-functionalist” theorist, in the sense that, although he acknowledges systems in society exist, power lies with actors and their ability to effect social change.

Giddens, however, is not without his critics. Craib (1992) argues a single, neat theory such as structuration does not adequately accommodate the “messiness” of social theory (Ritzer 2009:529). Other critics, Smith and Turner (1986) and Turner (1996), do not believe that structuration theory actually resolves or transcends any of the classic problems of agency and structure, but rather simply restates them with further empirical illustration. Having said this though, Smith and Turner (1986) suggest that there is general consensus about the original contribution brought by structuration, which provides an alternative theory to structuralism whose focus is on the determination of the individual by structure.

Giddens agrees that debates and dilemmas still exist concerning human action and social structure. Questions exist about the extent to which creative human actors are actively controlling the conditions of their own lives, and how these two concepts of social life relate to one another (Giddens 2009). In a similar fashion, Giddens is concerned with consensus and conflict in societies. Questions remain about the degree to which societies are seen as harmonious and orderly, or whether they should be seen as marked by persistent conflict. These positions are not completely opposed, Giddens (2009) argues, and sociology needs to show how consensus and conflict interrelate.

2.2.6 Post-structuralism

One may choose to define reality as small-scale micro events, or as a large-scale macro entity, or by placing emphasis on objective or subjective dimensions of knowledge and

experience (Ransome 2010). However, social theory is still faced with the problem, Ransome (2010:209) argues, of producing reliable and intelligible accounts of that reality. Language itself is highly structured, and social theory's "linguistic turn" during the early 20th Century saw the rise of post-structuralist ideas and their accompanying concern with culture and meaning (Ransom 2010:209).

As a set of broad responses to structuralism, and as an intellectual movement led by French and Continental philosophers and theorists, the seed of the post-structuralist critique can be seen in a single sentence, Turner (1996) argues. When Foucault (1963) wrote, "a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable", the focus of theorising can be seen as shifting from the maintenance of structure, rigid formulae and hard boundaries to ideas of permeability, contingency and temporality (Turner 1996:216). As a political critique, post-structuralism was founded on the question of whose purposes are served by the current boundary definitions. It can be seen at work in discourses such as feminism, psychoanalysis and Marxism (Turner 1996).

Poststructuralism can be characterised as being concerned with the 'discourses' associated with a particular problem (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:56). It is through language we construct discourses of power and it is in the construction of such 'discursive power' that oppression and disadvantage are perpetuated (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:56). Mendelson (2010:245) argues that,

Discourse is an idea fundamentally based with Saussure's (and other semioticians) differentiations between language as it is used (what he termed *parole*), and the systemic and structured underlying rules of language (*langue*). Discourse, is positioned with *parole*, focusing on language's patterns with regard to usage.

It is vital to consider that discourses are nearly always temporary, given a long enough timeframe (Mendelson 2010:245). Ransome (2010:249) concurs when arguing that discourse is the prevailing mode and manner of accounts and conversations that occur in society, making one period of history distinguishable from another (Ransome 2010:249). The rise of intellectual paradigms, or "epistemes" as Foucault called them, are defined as distinct and identifiable patterns in how social actors from a particular period tended to think about the world around them (Ransom 2010:249). Derrida and Foucault made bold pronouncements

about the world that there is nothing outside of text or discourse (Chaffee 2010). However, Chaffee (2010) questions, how social change can occur if the world is so dominated by language that nothing exists outside it.

Giddens, also a critic of poststructuralism, asserts that post-structuralist radicalisms do not have an account of the social power played by structure in shaping language. He goes on to assert that context should be central to any account of language (Chaffee 2010). Societies, nations and cultures, like the natural world, are all structured entities. Chaffee (2010:84) argues that the best lesson to be learnt from both structuralism and post-structuralism is the dynamic play of structures. Post-structuralism is a powerful cultural critique, a way to investigate the hidden workings of power at play in the way people communicate and construct social meaning (Chaffee 2010).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief ‘guided tour’ of the nature of “structure” as a concept, outlining some of its major or genealogical features, introducing foundational concepts and their debates, which are widely used in social sciences literature.

There is no end to the number of current debates across the vast spectrum of sociological subject matter. In 1959, C. Wright Mills theorised “the sociological imagination”, a concept that argued for a way of looking at the world that can see connections between the private troubles individuals face and the public spheres in which “issues” exist (Mills 1959/2010:7). ‘Issues’ have to do with matters that transcend the local environment of the individual or their inner life, and involves connecting various historical and cultural milieus with the personal (Scott & Marshall 2009). Willis (2004:64) equates these processes with a “quest” for sociological understanding of the world, invoking the sociological imagination as a form of consciousness for understanding social processes.

To further understand social processes, the next chapter is a review of the community development literature as it relates to structural practice, that is, making connections between community development theory and some of the theories that have been explored in this chapter on structure.

CHAPTER THREE: The Concept of Structure in Relation to Community Development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the remaining theoretical foundations of the study, examining community development and its links to the concept of structure. The following section is a review of the main theoretical epochs of community development since it began to be shaped by public policy. The third section takes a similar historical overview of Australian community work. The way in which this literature relates to ideas of structure or structural practice is summarised at various junctures in the section and is fully summarised in the fourth section. The fifth section discusses the implications for research, arguing that new theorising is required, that is, research that considers theory in-situ, or in the place where community development practice occurs. The literature highlights normative claims about structure and structural community development. However, *how* these ideas are being re-theorised by practitioners warrants exploration. Therefore, the fifth and final section concludes by discussing the conceptual framework for this study, one that shapes the theory-building aim of this project.

3.2 Theoretical Epochs and Links with Contemporary Structural Practice

3.2.1 The Importance of History

Community development texts commonly begin with an overview of the historical origins of the practice as a platform for particular theorising (see for example, Fisher 2005; Gilchrist 2009; Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009; Kenny 2011; Ledwith 2011; Popple 1995; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992). Likewise, from time to time, journal articles are also written dedicated to historical perspectives and their implications for contemporary practice (see for example, Kenny 1996; Mowbray 1996; Popple 2006). Considering varying epochs of social thought helps make sense of the present. Moreover, history matters, Fisher

(2005:34) argues, as it provides a collective memory and historical shoulders upon which to stand.

What follows is a historical overview of phases of community development predominantly drawn from British and Australian literature, although literature from North America and other post-industrialised countries has also been used. I have drawn from British literature because, with Australia's history of colonisation by Britain, many parallels exist between British and Australian community work and politics. I have chosen to take an historical view because important lessons can be learned from a critical reading of the past, not only looking for parallels and continuities, but also recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008).

Theoretical phases and political debates in relation to achieving social change are pertinent to community development practice over time (Poppo 1995; Shaw & Martin 2000). Each new theory arose out of the critiques from earlier theoretical standpoints. Poppo (1995) categorises these as "pluralist" community work theories; "radical" and "socialist" community work theories; "feminist" and "anti-racist" community work theories and, also from wider cultural politics, what has come to be understood as the politics of "identity and difference" (Shaw & Martin 2000). Thorpe (1992), locating community work within various political ideologies, provides similar categories to Poppo's (2005) account. However, Thorpe (1992) adds one other category, "consensus" political ideology. Thorpe (1992:25) helpfully represents these categories on a political continuum. On the left, she locates "structuralist" ideology, in the middle she locates "pluralist" ideology and on the right, she locates "consensus" politics. She defines "consensus" community work as spanning both conservative and liberal forms of politics.

The following sub-section provides a brief overview of the origins of community development practice, as well as highlighting the problems with defining the practice because of its broad applicability.

3.2.2. Practice Origins and Problems with Defining Practice

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the emergence of British community work as an identified activity, establishing itself alongside casework and group work, as the third approach to social work (Popple 2006). The British-produced *Community Development Journal (CDJ)* was first published in 1966. The journal was established to effectively reflect the changing and dynamic field of community development internationally (Popple 2006). Craig, Popple and Shaw (2008) argue *CDJ* is now considered the most prestigious international journal focusing on community development. On the other side of the northern hemisphere, in 1970, another high profile community development journal was established. The *Journal of the Community Development Society*, (now called *Community Development*), was primarily concerned with practice in North America (Popple 2006). Like its British counterpart, it began as a response to a need. It provided opportunities to build skills and research the practice discipline of the newly emerging profession (Walzer 2010).

Forty-year reflections on both these prominent journals by Popple (2006) and Walzer (2010) highlighted a number of salient issues relevant to contemporary practice. The first relates to the breadth of contexts to which community development practice can be applied. In 1990, *CDJ* compiled a cumulative index of topics the journal had covered to that point in time, showing 150 different themes reflecting the diverse nature and applicability of the practice to varying contexts, as well as the evolution of theory throughout changing social, political and economic times (Popple 2006). Walzer (2010) argues that fully recognising the differences in community development across the world and learning from practice in these diverse contexts is a major opportunity for contemporary practitioners into the future.

A second issue for contemporary practice, Walzer (2010) argues, is to create a common understanding and appreciation of core principles of community development as well as a recognised curriculum for community development education. Students graduating with a degree in community development must understand a basic core set of principles, and Walzer (2010) surmises that members of Community Development Society, readers and authors of journal contributions, are uniquely positioned to identify and promote these among educational institutions. Walzer's (2010) concern about developing a common understanding of core principles forty years after the practice became formally recognised is significant. It suggests the very diversity and broad applicability of the practice is problematic. This creates challenges when one seeks to distill normative characteristics, those that might be considered relevant to community development as a specific discipline.

In an article in the second issue of *CDJ*, Biddle (1966) discussed the challenges of defining community development because of its “fuzziness”. Biddle (1966) argued then that confusion existed about the practice because of its very ubiquity. Enthusiasts of the practice can describe very different experiences but lay claim to the same title of Community Development, largely because, Biddle (1966) argued, of the varieties of method found in the work, the populations involved and the backgrounds of the practitioners. Practitioners are the ultimate “generalists”; capable of expediting whatever pro-social programs are evolved to meet people’s needs (Biddle 1966). However, practitioners’ training and backgrounds mean they tend to define the field and identify with specific interests, which are only part, but not all, of the whole (Biddle 1966). Furthermore, community development practice can be located within a range of fields beyond those usually associated with the social services. For example, in Australia, development practice can be found in the environment sector, the Landcare movement, Urban Planning, peace and conflict work and also across informal and formal groups, networks and organisations, including non-Government organisations and Government departments, particularly in local government. Similarly, Gilchrist (2003) writing from the United Kingdom makes links with the practice and social work, housing, education, anti-poverty work, health and local economic development.

In those early days when the field was establishing itself Biddle (1966) identified community development within the social sciences, suggesting how varying social science traditions provided different emphasises on community development. These include: sociological perspectives emphasising the structural concept of “community”; anthropological perspectives emphasising local social customs and people’s interventions in processes of social change; and psychological perspectives highlighting group dynamics and meaning-making processes (Biddle 1966). Traditions also include social processes such as action-research, which are particularly pertinent to community development because of the experimental and location-unique nature of activities, enabling learning and participant-planned change (Biddle 1966). An action-research approach is what Stringer (2007:11-12) names as “inquiry in use”, involving small-scale theorising for specific problems in specific situations.

Community development’s broad-based theoretical traditions, its applicability to various contexts and its use of various approaches, caused confusion within the then burgeoning

field. Therefore, Biddle (1966) offered a basic definition. Quoting from a previous work, he said:

Community Development is a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world.....Personality growth through group responsibility is the focus (Biddle & Biddle, 1965).

Alongside the “fuzziness” factor (Biddle 1996), which causes ideological and theoretical confusion or contestation within or about the field, the literature suggests a number of core features which define the practice. For example, methods predicated on values of community empowerment and citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000; Shaw 2007); communities identifying and giving effective voice to their needs (Halliwell 1969; Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009); and communities being enabled to take collective control and responsibility for their own development (Kenny 2011). Other definitions view community development as an instrument to challenge persistent poverty and resist disempowerment brought on by globalising or macro-level forces impacting upon communities (Babacan & Gopalkrishnan 2001; Craig 1998). Still others emphasise postmodern theoretical orientations, highlighting differing and shifting forms of power, the construction and reconstruction of reality, and multiplicities of being, particularly as they relate to understandings of ‘community’ (Burkett 2001; Ife 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

Just over forty years after formal recognition of the profession, when practice began to be shaped by public policy (Walzer, 2010), community development is still today a “catch-all” term (Pople 2006). Pople (2006) makes this argument when referring particularly to the British New Labour government’s use of the term to address issues of social inclusion and disadvantage. While no longer governing in Britain, New Labour’s social policy agendas for “community empowerment” (Shaw 2007), “tackling poverty and social exclusion” and place-based “community capacity building” (Craig 2007) gained ascendancy and now dominate the social policy landscape for community development in Australia and across the globe (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009). This indicates that the ubiquity and applicability of the term has only increased with time, with governments funding a range of programs and projects in the name of community development.

It also suggests a politicisation of the practice. Shaw (2007) refers to “ideological elasticity”, where ideas of ‘community’ have been “appropriated” to legitimate or justify a wide range of political positions, known as the “politics of community” (Shaw 2007). Moreover, Shaw (2007) argues, the way in which community is constructed politically provides discourses and practices which frame how practice is undertaken at any given time. Thus, the politics of community should not be ignored. Collins (2010) also refers to the new politics of community and the idea of community as an elastic political construct. She argues that, by reframing the idea of community as a political construct, this provides “new avenues for investigating social inequalities” (Collins 2010:7) and can be a powerful organising principle for social justice initiatives.

In conclusion, as a distinct practice approach, community development in all its guises draws on social solidarity, personal and collective well-being. Additionally, it can provide a lens through which existing societal structures and practices can be scrutinized in order to find more egalitarian, supportive and sustainable alternatives, or, the “world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). The broad-based community development literature, some of which is discussed in this chapter, attests to these kinds of outcomes, despite the problems of consensus around terminology and differing theoretical orientations as they have evolved over time. Three of these approaches are discussed in the next sub-sections. The first of these relates to the theoretical epochs of consensus and pluralist approaches to community development, both of which emerged from conservative politics. This is followed by a discussion on social capital, a more contemporary concept in community development, which also has links to conservative politics.

3.2.3 Consensus and Pluralist Approaches

Thorpe (1992) argues that much of the ideology in community work stems from the British experience of the Community Development Projects (CDPs), which were established with a consensus model of community work originating in 1969. The CDPs were the central government’s response to problems of urban decay and multiple deprivation, involving the coordination of local services, and stimulating “self-help” amongst the “deprived” (Thorpe 1992:22). As a way to empower “hard-hit” localities, inherent within the CDPs was the understanding that well-being was good for labour market participation (Amin 2005:613).

The CDPs also understood that by increasing a sense of community, small-scale activity in the alternative economy could be spawned (Amin 2005). The architects of CDP had an underpinning assumption that the cause of the deprivation was the people themselves, because of their low self-esteem and lack of social cohesion (Thorpe 1992). However, the community development workers found these assumptions untenable when working with people faced with low wages, unemployment and appalling housing conditions (Thorpe 1992). A “self-help” response was deemed to be a woefully inappropriate response as workers refined their analysis to the causes and nature of the problems they encountered (Thorpe 1992). The ideology behind this version of a self-help approach to community development has its roots in conservative ideology, where the nature of problems is seen as a result of a lack of cohesion and community spirit, rather than seen as a result of inequalities which exist between different groups in society (Thorpe 1992). Subsequently, the CDP workers abandoned the consensus model as both ineffectual and offensively “victim-blaming”, turning to a pluralist model for explanation of social problems and guidance for practice (Thorpe 1992:23).

The pluralist model views social problems as arising from the “imbalances in democratic and bureaucratic systems” (Thorpe 1992:23, citing Community Development Project 1974:23). The role of community work in this paradigm is to help various groups overcome the problems they face in their neighbourhoods by mutual support, sharing activities and by attempting to secure better services for their members (Popple 1995). The shift is from one of self-help (as in the consensus model) to one where disadvantage is seen in terms of access to resources and decision-making (Thorpe 1992). Task-oriented community action, such as Alinsky-style tactics (Alinsky 1971), replaces more process-oriented community development, where the aim is to wrest from authorities the services to which people have a democratic right (Thorpe 1992). In these scenarios, the state is a neutral arbiter (Thorpe 1992) and has a role in balancing the competing interests represented, ensuring political decision-making takes account of a range of expressed views (Popple 1995). Unfortunately, the CDP workers experienced first hand the shortcomings of a pluralist approach when political decisions failed to support the deprived, no matter how sophisticated and confident they became (Thorpe 1992). With decisions made in favour of big business, a structural conflict model was adopted to explain continuing inequalities (Thorpe 1992). This resulted in CDP workers increasingly challenging the governmental bodies who funded the project, until the projects were shut down (Thorpe 1992).

Popple and Quinney (2002) argue the mediating and managing processes inherent within the pluralist paradigm make it a top-down approach. Governments fund processes of community work in the hope that social ills will be addressed in lieu of spending significant sums of public money (Popple & Quinney 2002). Although pluralist approaches acknowledge the structural nature of deprivation and recognises the political dimension of community work, with its focus on micro-change, it is primarily concerned with social consensus and only marginal improvements (Popple 1995). With a focus on 'neighbourhood', pluralist approaches fail to sufficiently connect with the production and reproduction of inequalities in the wider society, which result in problems in localities (Popple 1995). Popple's critique can be identified as from a radical or structural community work paradigm and is discussed later in this chapter.

This sub-section has shown, firstly, that the dimensions of structure inherent within consensus approaches have an inherently local focus, those focusing on micro-structural processes. The focus is on inter-group and intra-group dynamics, supposedly leading to greater self-esteem and social cohesion, and also on structures of service delivery in local communities. Secondly, the dimensions of structure inherent within pluralist approaches embrace a greater degree of conflict within the model, where a vertical dimension of structure is considered. Greater macro processes causing inequality across various communities are seen to cause social conditions locally. Processes for remedying that inequality involves forms of democratic participation where, alongside other interest groups in society, groups make micro-macro connections from their local community to policy makers. The concept of social capital as it relates to community development can be located within these paradigms of consensus and pluralist approaches and is discussed in the next section.

3.2.4 Social Capital

Contemporary community work in democratic societies has seen the rise and ascendance of "social capital" as a concept associated with sustainable community development (see for example, Campbell, Hughes, Hewstone & Cairns 2010; Dale & Newman 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Other theorists used the concept earlier, Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988) and Loury (1977), as cited by DeFilippis (2001). However, Robert Putnam's works (1993;

2000) are most often cited as expanding the theory (Bryson & Mowbray 2005; Mandall 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Putnam's version has had a rapid rise in popularity with policy makers, academics, politicians and those working with communities (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). By researching and contrasting two regions in Italy, one prosperous and one impoverished, Putnam theorised their differences as attributed to their ability to generate 'social capital' (Geoghegan & Powell 2009; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

Social capital refers to the structure of relations, that is, social networks and the norms of trust and reciprocity that arise from them (Putnam 2000), enabling people to collectively resolve common problems and achieve common goals (Healy, 2007). Putnam places emphasis on two main concepts, firstly, "bonding social capital" which is defined as homogeneous social connections and networks built on bonds of loyalty and reciprocity, and which are good mechanisms for mobilising solidarity (2000:22). Putnam's second emphasis is on "bridging social capital", which is defined as networks better for linkage to assets external to a community, and for information dissemination (2000:22).

Putnam's version of social capital was appealing because of its ability to describe and potentially measure the "intangible" core to community life - relationships, trust, reciprocity and networks (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:83), and because it was seen as the antidote for civic disengagement (Mandell 2010). Not surprisingly, policy makers seized upon social capital's utility, promoting community as the site where responsibility for ameliorating social problems lies (Bryson & Mowbray 2005).

Two critiques of social capital are relevant to theoretical foundations conceptualising structure in communities. One involves the 'measurement' discourse, which is argued by Fine (2001), as a colonising of social theory by the field of economics. The renewed interest in community by policy makers has been welcomed, however, a significant downside includes the way in which an increasing focus has been placed on the achievement of narrowly defined outcomes within set timeframes. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue:

If we can now measure all those previously unmeasurable aspects of community work, the argument goes, community workers should be able to fit much better into established accountability structures.....the consequence of this is, that all work which

is more complex to measure, becomes marginalised as lacking credibility and ‘evidence’ for its validity (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:58).

The idea of evidence raises an important issue for community development, that is, effective ways of evaluating practice. Craig (2002) argued that the evaluation of public service programs has become a growing and contested concern. Evaluation is undertaken to know “what works”, that is, to ensure proper use of public money, and also to ascertain how to improve practice (Craig 2002). However, arising from the “new managerialism” discourse, evaluation of programs has placed emphasis on identifiable and quantifiable outputs, which do not necessarily capture the effective outcomes of community development programs (Craig 2002).

A second critique of social capital relates to the way in which it fails to recognise the way in which power operates in social contexts, providing opportunities for some communities to “get ahead”, while others can only access the kind of social capital to “get by” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:83; Taylor, Wilkinson & Cheers 2008). It does not challenge power inequities that exist between communities (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011), but promotes “feel good” connections in a world where elites still control resources in political, economic and cultural domains (Skocopl 2003, cited by Mandell 2010). DeFilippis (2008:34) refers to social capital and another well-known approach to contemporary practice, Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993), with its emphasis on inside-out development, as forms of “neo-liberal communitarianism”. With a focus on consensus-building and ‘win-win’ relations, these concepts have a core belief that society is conflict-free, thus resulting in the practice’s de-politicisation (DeFilippis 2008). However, with an analysis of inequality and stratification in society, one sees the inadequacy of such approaches.

The dimensions of structure relevant to this discussion are that social capital is a theory about a structure of relations, that is, networks. Networks are used in community development so communities can solve problems and achieve goals. Social capital places emphasis on micro-structural processes, however, has the potential to span micro and macro-structural dimensions with its bridging and linking emphases. The current social policy context for community development has embraced communitarian ideals such as those found in social capital theory. However, it was posited that these ideals are shaped by a neo-liberal agenda.

This agenda has disconnected communitarianism structurally from political and economic capital (DeFilippis 2001) and, consequently, has a limited analysis of the power communities have to attract and retain such capital from which they would benefit.

This sub-section on social capital and the previous sub-section have introduced critiques of consensus and pluralist political paradigms from a structuralist political paradigm. It has been shown that consensus and pluralist theoretical orientations still dominate today despite these structural critiques. Further discussion of structural critiques, as well as their application to community development is discussed in the next sub-section.

3.2.5 Structural Critiques and Approaches

Pluralist theories dominated the field of community work after WWII, but came under heavy criticism from the radical approach of the late 1960s and 1970s. An epoch dubbed “the time of ferment” (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003:6) saw the rise of activism and social movements across a range of disenfranchised groups worldwide, highlighting various forms of inequality in society. Popple (1995:39) argues that the main critique of pluralism from a radical perspective is that it fails to make effective theoretical and practical connections between individuals’ experiences and the changing nature of society. A range of structural critiques challenged the pluralist approaches from various political ideologies including feminism, socialism, Marxism, anarchism and a liberationist paradigm (Thorpe 1992).

The structuralist approach has an analysis of the inherent conflicts that exist in society whereby certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others (Popple & Quinney 2002). Poverty is perpetuated by economic, political, and social structures, creating an unequal distribution of resources and power throughout society and resulting in various oppressive forces and structures subordinating less powerful groups (Mullaly 2007; Popple & Quinney 2002).

It is not uncommon to find reference to community development practice being a vehicle to redress structural disadvantage in the literature (see for example, Burkett 2001; Gilchrist 2009; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Kelly & Burkett 2005; Kelly & Sewell 1988; Kenny 2011; Ledwith 2011; Weeks, Hoatson & Dixon 2003). Other authors refer to this process as

‘social transformation’, (see for example, Andrews 2007; Eade 2003), and in the USA, it is referred to as ‘radical community organizing’ (Reisch 2005). Community work from this perspective provides opportunities to challenge capitalist relations and assist those groups that it believes are oppressed to achieve gains (Popple & Quinney 2002). Further, the structuralist analysis of the 1960s and 1970s highlighted community work’s subversive potential to be both ‘in and against’ the state, in that it exposed the fundamental contradictions of state-sponsored community work, particularly the belief that local solutions could be found to structural problems (Corkey & Craig 1978).

It should be noted that the literature refers to community development as having the ability to reinforce dominant structures of oppression (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Stories of poor, ineffective, or “far from enabling” (Shaw 2003) community development practices are not uncommon, which gives rise to the argument for sound reflexive practice (Mullaly 2002). More significantly, the literature on *how* structural disadvantage is redressed methodologically through community development is not clearly articulated. A cohort of teachers and practitioners associated with the University of Queensland (Lathouras 2010) have, for the past thirty five years, together and in succession, been reflecting on these ideas. Formal research and publications from this group, however, have been limited. (See publications from this cohort, Andrews 2012; Burkett 1998; Dasgupta 1974 & 1980; Daveson 1996; Halliwell 1969; Kelly & Burkett 2005; Kelly & Sewell 1988; Owen & Westoby 2011; Westoby & Dowling 2009; Westoby & Ingamells 2011; Westoby & Owen 2009). Other literature advocating community development as a way to reduce structural disadvantage is extremely limited in its discussion of practical ways to approach this task. Ten years ago, Kenny (2002) argued that the identification of effective strategies to launch the symbolic, ideological, and micro-structural processes that challenge the ongoing subjugation that occurs in everyday life is one of the big challenges still to be met for community development. It can be argued that this is still the case today.

3.2.5.1. Critical Community Development

Ledwith (2011) provides an exception, articulating a clear example of community development within a structuralist paradigm. Ledwith’s approach was formulated through three lenses, including the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971), who first theorised the concept

of *hegemony*, as “the way that a dominant group asserts control over other social groups” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:159); Paulo Freire (1985) with his approach to critical pedagogy; and feminist theory, with critiques of these two thinkers, exposing their patriarchal assumptions and class-based analyses (Ledwith, 2011).

Ledwith (2011) draws on Freire’s (1970; 1985) transformative theory of lived reality where, through the stories of people and with relations of trust, mutuality and respect, dialogue forms the basis of praxis. Storytelling holds the potential for radical change in everyday life and is the linchpin between past experience and imagined futures (Ledwith 2011:70). Ledwith outlines a structured process of storytelling and dialogue with community groups (2011:68-71) that involve “respectful questioning”, “connected knowing”, which means profound empathy with experiences and ideas different from our own, and collective analysis about forms of power inherent to the stories. Processes of imagined “counternarratives” are then undertaken, reconstructing the original stories in new ways, so group members can explore how they can influence new directions and futures through action (Ledwith 2011:71).

This form of critical pedagogy, Ledwith (2011) argues, involves processes beginning with personal empowerment and extending to critical, collective action. It ranges from local projects to movements for change. However, Ledwith argues, collective organising in current times is faced with the resistance of a culture of individualism and a politics of consumerism (2011:108). Moreover, these are unprecedented political times (Ledwith 2011; McIntyre-Mills 2010), particularly in the wake of escalating world crises of social justice, environmental instability and the fragility of capitalism. The latter is exemplified by the 2007 banking crisis, which revealed the extent of corporate greed and inappropriate risk taking, and which led to a world recession (Ledwith 2011:1).

Reflecting on the progress of community development since her critical approach was first published in 1995, Ledwith argues:

Never has there been a more important opportunity for community development to redefine its radical agenda and to engage with injustice in the process of progressive social change (2011:2).

Furthermore, in a globalised world, shifting boundaries are occurring between state, civil society and the market (Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw & Taylor 2011), which threaten to add to the widening gaps between poverty and prosperity (Ledwith 2011). An ideology of the market and its “profit-over-people-and-planet” imperative is seeing structures of oppression implicit in this ideology now reproduced on a global scale (Ledwith 2011:1).

Community development faces two major “sticking points” that reduce its critical potential, Ledwith argues:

One is the resistance to developing theory in practice; the other is the reluctance to move beyond community to harness a greater collective force for change. Networks, campaigns and alliances offer structures to harness collective power outside community, but if these are to be successful, we need to develop theory and skills that support working across difference (2011:110).

Ledwith’s version of practice is one that aligns with structural critiques and approaches highlighting that, in a globalised world where economic and market-forces dominate, socio-political domains have lost traction. Structural inequalities persist as membership of society is constructed with the individual as consumer within a market economy (Ledwith 2011). Structural connections between individuals experiencing oppression and the causes of that oppression are not being made satisfactorily or to any great extent, and Ledwith’s approach to community development highlights the need for micro-macro structural connections. However, making such connections can be problematic, particularly if practice emphasises locality work only.

Gilchrist’s (2009) networking approach to community development has attempted to do this, providing a useful theory for thinking about ways to make structural connections and thereby creating possibilities for reducing the deleterious effects of oppression. This theory is discussed in the next sub-section.

3.2.5.2 Networking and Structural Community Development

The idea of networking is not new to community development. It is a term found in many texts (see for example, Kenny 2011; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Stepney & Popple 2008), and is considered a core process when communities and wider society are seen in terms of a complex system with patterns of connections for processing and disseminating information (Gilchrist 2009). Gilchrist refers to social capital theory (2009:6), however focuses strongly on its bridging and linking forms. Gilchrist theorises the concept of “meta-networking” (2009:73), that is, facilitating connections between networks, challenging preconceptions, creating opportunities for shared activities and encouraging dialogue across apparent boundaries. Her theory, entitled “the well-connected community”, is a way of thinking about community as the emergent property of complex and dynamic social systems, having the ability to adapt to changing organisational and political environments (Gilchrist 2009).

Gilchrist’s (2009) networking approach provides some guidance, particularly when considering patterns of connections beyond micro-structural levels. Indeed, vibrant networks can help communities function more effectively, however, as Curtis (2010) argues, it should never be assumed networks could totally compensate for material inequalities. Curtis’ emphasis brings one’s thinking back to the nub of the structuralist paradigm, which highlights inequality and poverty as having macro-level drivers causing the subordination of less powerful groups in society.

One could argue that the movement from micro-structural to macro-structural analysis and processes makes for complicated practice. Another complication arises when postmodernist social theory weighs in to debates on community development. Postmodernism created new opportunities and new emphases for practice, but also created theoretical discontinuities. These are the subject of the next section and its two sub-sections on structure and agency, and a reconceptualisation of power.

3.2.6 Postmodern Perspectives and Community Development

Postmodern theories emerged in the latter half of the 20th Century, heralding unprecedented ways of critical thinking as well as “smashing up” old certainties (Oksala 2007:1). Its theories have had a significant impact on social and political thought, particularly for those seeking alternative formulations to dominant paradigms (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). A

postmodern social theory examines the social world from multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other identifying group affiliations and, at the same time, rejects totalising claims such as those seen in grand narratives like Marxism (Agger, 1991). Ife and Tesoriero provide a definition of postmodernism by stating:

It rejects the dominant paradigm as being the essence of the 'modern' and seeks different, non-linear models of cultural production and critique that reject conventional forms of logic and discourse.....reality can no longer be understood in terms of a single 'meta-narrative' but is characterized by multiple discourses, fragmented meanings and continual simultaneous redefinitions; to seek a single unifying and integrating model, answer or paradigm is both futile and meaningless (2006:41).

Postmodern approaches to community development respond to the diversity and heterogeneity that are part of our cultural and social experiences (Kenny 2011). Additionally, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:139) argue, postmodernism emphasises the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of multiple 'realities' in a fragmented, rather than unified, world.

Kenny (2011) and Ife and Tesoriero (2006) argue community development practice simultaneously embraces principles that are drawn from both the project of modernity and the post-modern critique of modernity. Further, post-modern thinking accepts the integrity and authenticity of ordinary people and rejects the all-knowing intellectual or the expert practitioner (Kenny 2011:104). The relevance and challenge that this type of thinking has on contemporary community development practice involves the acknowledgement that communities and societies are continually changing; an awareness that there are multiple sites of power and sources of oppression; and that struggles occur on all levels (Kenny 2011:104). The post-modern viewpoint emphasises responding to domination and control in the multiplicity of ways in which they occur and encourages a plurality of viewpoints and practices in response to these (Kenny 2011:104).

However, a negative appraisal of postmodern approaches, with its emphasis on fragmentation and multiples truths, is that they may lead people to abandon political principles, goals and strategies for a better society, thus leaving a political vacuum which can be filled by those

seeking power (Kenny 2011). Ledwith (2011) cites Fisher and Ponniah (2003), who argue that any counter-hegemony processes, such as global movements, must tread a fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, the idea of harnessing both difference and convergence.

In conclusion, the weight given to structure in the radical analysis reduced those not defined primarily in class terms as passive objects of policy, as distinct from active subjects in politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Moreover, given the emphasis on what could be seen as too much structure and not enough agency, radical community work was in danger of becoming trapped in “dichotomous rather than dialectical thinking” (Shaw & Martin 2000). Postmodern theories, with their emphasis on identity and difference, provided new theoretical perspectives for community development, particularly when power could be seen in its multiple forms, and multiple forms of agency enabled. These theories on agency and power are critical for community development and are explored in the next two sections.

3.2.6.1 Structure and Agency

Placing emphasis on the efficacy of human action, or ‘agency’ (Sewell 1992), gives rise to theories which view humans as active subjects, as opposed to passive objects of politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, discussed in the previous chapter, has been used by community development theorists, Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002), to illuminate their thinking about how people re-constitute their lives whilst being constituted by the structures of society.

Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002) focus on Giddens’ concept of “modalities” which are “cultural traditions and patterns”, a means by which structures are translated into action. Arguing that social solidarity is an aim of community development, Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002) state that modalities represent the form solidarity takes, established by people following symbolic norms and patterns available to them, and based on their cultures and traditions. A commonly used technique in community development, processes that facilitate the telling of personal stories, is an example of a modality that builds bonds between people and helps to break down feelings of isolation around matters of individual concern. The

bonds that are created through these processes are important and often lead to various collective action endeavours or collective agency.

Though a Giddens lens, it can be seen how structures shape and can be shaped by modalities (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). Community change agents are not seen as powerless when faced with powerful structures, as cultural patterns can be transformed to influence or break down structural constraints that inhibit solidarity or capacity building (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). Social movement theorists, Goodwin and Jasper, give an example of “a structure”, the state, as one of the main players with which social movements interact (2004:viii). The state, they argue, is a structure that people tend to see as a unified actor, rather than a complex web of agencies and authorities saturated with culture, emotions, and strategic interactions (Goodwin & Jasper 2004). This emphasis on nuance and culture in relation to one entity is the kind of thinking that generates agency.

Structuration theory is helpful to community development because it links macro and micro theories, or the individual and the structures of society when, through various modalities, structures and power differences are transformed (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). On the other hand, Goodwin and Jasper (2004) also argue that there is still much to learn about the elements of political process theory, particularly in relation to culture and emotions associated with social movements, as well as the concept of agency as seen in relation to the limits of structuralist theories.

Reconceptualising power through a postmodern lens is another of the elements helpful for increasing agency. These ideas are discussed in the next section.

3.2.6.2 Reconceptualising Power

The literature suggests, as noted earlier, that community development can provide a lens through which existing societal structures and practices can be scrutinized, in order to find more egalitarian, supportive and sustainable alternatives, or the “world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). With analyses of the root causes of inequality and oppression, and with the knowledge that structures are produced and reproduced when acted upon by agents of change, it is possible to see the emancipatory potential of community development. At the

heart of this idea is another contribution from postmodernist thought, which also enables community development's emancipatory potential, that is, the idea of reconceptualising power.

Foucault (1980) theorised power as being produced rather than owned (Oynx 1996; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Power is not situated in particular people or institutions and because it is produced and reproduced, it can be challenged (Prior 2009; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Taylor 2007). Moreover, the way power is used can be resisted and new forms of power produced, particularly forms of power from below (Ife 2010). Multiple forms of wisdom are valued rather than any single, unifying worldview imposed from above (Ife 2010).

However, Shaw (2007) argues, community does not exist within a political vacuum, but reflects and reinforces the dynamics of power within particular contexts and times. The Foucaultian emphasis on power provides a way of shaping those contexts, highlighting particularly that power is formed at the periphery, not the centre (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). This analysis provides a spatial dimension to power, where practice at the "localized margins" provides opportunities to see how power is exercised, made sense of, responded to and changed into new forms of power (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:4). Further, the Foucaultian emphasis on language also provides thinking about how power relations are shaped through various discourses, which are, like power, also dynamic and fluid in nature (Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Community development has a role to make space for subjugated voices and knowledge and, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue, this type of resistance at the periphery can destabilise dominant discourses.

Power is central to thinking and working critically with communities to achieve change for social justice (Ledwith 2011; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Indeed, no development strategy can 'opt out' of the realities of power, particularly those that generate and perpetuate poverty (Berner & Phillips 2009). Postmodernist ideas help reconceptualise power to this end, as do newer ideas about power, some of which are introduced below.

Thompson and Thompson (2001) understand power as multilayered, where power is understood at personal, cultural and structural levels (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Andrews (1996) presents a similar framework to Thompson and Thompson (2001), with the

additional dimension of empowerment through community development at social, as well as personal, cultural and structural levels.

Gaventa's (2006) approach to analysing power has provided additional tools for contemporary practice (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009). His 'power cube' provides a three-dimensional model, introducing a number of frameworks for imagining power. One of those frameworks, useful in terms of understanding power, involves four concepts, 'power-over', 'power-to', 'power-within', and 'power-with'. The concept in which some form of control is exercised by a person or a group of people over others is known as "power-over" (Gaventa 2006). The concept in which people develop a sense of agency is known as "power-to" (Gaventa 2006:6). The concept in which people gain a sense of confidence, a pre-condition necessary for action, is known as "power within" (Gaventa 2006:6). Finally, the concept in which people use synergistic energy, often found in collaborative partnerships, collective action and alliance building is known as "power with" (Gaventa 2006:6). Analysing power from various perspectives opens up possibilities for increasing power and, therefore, Gaventa's various frameworks provide a range of ways in which practitioners and community members can undertake power analyses and be empowered.

Structural accounts of social issues see the problems in communities lying in oppressive and inequitable social structures, an approach that can be likened to "blaming the system" (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:55). On the other hand, post-structural perspectives, which emphasise deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge and power, provide opportunities for people to shape alternative imaginings of both community "problems" and "solutions" (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:55). Therefore, whilst creating a theoretical discontinuity from what had come before, postmodernist theoretical perspectives have the potential to facilitate community development's emancipatory agenda, when options for new forms of power and agency are generated.

The dimensions of structure identified in postmodernism, structure and agency, and reconceptualising power, have highlighted three key concepts – nuance, balance and transformation. Postmodern perspectives provided thinking about heterogeneity, that is, diverse cultural patterns within society. They also highlighted multiple analyses and possibilities for responses to situations, or the need for nuance. However, fragmented meanings and continual simultaneous redefinitions can be taken too far, causing community

development to lose some of its unifying principles for a better society. This suggests the idea of balance is necessary, where practice needs to hold or straddle multiple objectives, those enabling both difference and convergence. Postmodern perspectives also provided thinking about the transformative elements of practice, particularly in relation to how people can reconceptualise power and how these have the potential for greater agency.

One of those possible transformative ideas can be seen through the lens of citizenship and democratic renewal. This is discussed in the next section and provides the final theoretical foundation for exploring the concept of structure within this historical overview.

3.2.7 Social Democratic Reform Through Citizenship

Saul Alinsky's seminal text *Rules for Radicals* (1971) called for a "reformation", the process where masses of people reach a point of disillusionment with past ways and values and then, together, organise, build power and change the system from within (Alinsky 1971:114). Discussing the importance of democracy, Alinsky (1971:115) was "desperately concerned" that masses of people, through lack of interest or opportunity, are resigned to live lives determined by others. He argued that,

The spirit of democracy is the idea of importance and worth in the individual, and faith in the kind of world where the individual can achieve as much of his (sic) potential as possible.... Separation of the people from the routine daily functions of citizenship is heartbreak in a democracy (Alinsky 1971:115).

Active citizenship can be traced back to the ancient Greek concept of *agora*, a site of political assembly, an interface between the public and private spheres of social life (Geoghegan & Powell 2009). In contemporary times, community development can be seen as an expression of "the political and politicized assembly of an active citizenry in civil society" (Geoghegan & Powell 2009). Geoghegan and Powell's definition of the practice is:

Community development is a form of politics whereby citizens participate in civil society through communicative action in order to directly socialize policy issues (Geoghegan & Powell 2009).

Civil society can be understood as one of the spheres of social activity, alongside the sphere of the state or government, and the sphere of the market or for-profit business (Kenny 2011:111). It is a sphere where citizens “come together freely and independently to discuss issues and work collectively to influence and shape their society” (Kenny 2011:128).

Varying conceptions of citizenship have been discussed in community development theory and practice over time, (see for example, Alinsky 1971; Gaventa 2001; Kenny 1997; Powell & Geoghegan 2005; Shaw & Martin 2000; Taylor 2007), and historically it has occupied a position between policy and politics, that is, formal institutions of the state and informal practices of communities (Shaw 2011).

In a discussion on the tension between “process” and “outcome” to achieve a vision, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:273) argue Alinsky’s “pragmatic” approach had an emphasis on outcomes at all costs. Alinsky (1971) emphasised an extreme approach, that the ends justifies the means (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:273). Yet, in relation to this discussion on citizenship, an alternative view of achieving a vision can be seen in the Gandhian (1964) approach, which sees process and outcome as integrated (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Based on principles of non-violence Gandhi’s approach encompasses a theory of human liberation and social change (Reisch 2005). One of the 20th Century’s most prominent figures (Lal 2012), Gandhi’s role in India’s struggle for freedom from British rule is legendary, and arguably, epitomised citizenship. “Do or Die”, he urged Indians, in his 1942 “Quit India” movement (Lal 2009). As a practitioner of non-violent resistance, Lal (2009) argues, Gandhi displayed a “rather distinct and admirable sensibility in his articulation of care as a moral imperative”. Gandhi counselled people to engage in those struggles that were in their proximity or held the most meaning for them (Lal 2012). Yet, on the other hand, as citizens of the world one cannot be free if others are enslaved, therefore, Lal (2012) argues, contemporary struggles are ones “that we must all join”.

Shaw and Martin (2000) provide an overview of key phases of community work, identifying discourses of citizenship and the “problems” these constructions have raised. These phases include: social democracy and the problem of the inactive citizen; the structuralist critique and the problem of citizen action; marketisation and the problem of citizen as customer; and, democratic renewal and the challenge of active citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Embedded in a pluralist political ideology, the social democracy viewpoint locates citizenship in terms of self-help and citizens becoming active (Shaw & Martin 2000). An example of this was discussed earlier in relation to the CDPs in Britain. Underpinned by Marxist political thought and from the standpoint of a raised consciousness regarding various forms of exploitation and alienation, the structuralist critique views citizenship in terms of the working class and political activism (Corkey & Craig, 1978; Shaw & Martin 2000).

The market framework is constructed around the intersecting discourses of individual self-interest and self-help, private initiative, enterprise and competition, and where a transfer of activities from the state to the private sector has occurred (Kenny, 2002). Within a neo-liberal political ideology, society is viewed in terms of possessive individualism, and citizenship is viewed in terms of social entrepreneurship or consumerism (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Geoghegan and Powell (2009) argue that, in the 21st Century, the *agora* is under sustained attack from neo-liberalism, with its assumption that ‘good change’ equates with economic growth. In such a scenario, civil society is subservient to the needs of “untrammelled” economic ‘development’, and widening social inequality is an integral function of wealth creation (Powell & Geoghegan 2004:6). Power has become decentered in a globalised world dominated by “oligarchical capitalism” (where the wealth of multinational corporations frequently exceeds that of nation states) and “supranational oligarchies of power” (epitomised by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the Group of Eight) (Powell & Geoghegan 2004:6).

With power in the hands of a relatively small number of elites, and state-led development effectively eclipsed (Powell & Geoghegan 2004), this context has given rise to the theoretical position of civil society needing to be reclaimed through the repoliticisation of citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000). With the global restructuring of capital undermining the sovereignty of the nation state and exerting pressure to maximize profits and cut back on public expenditure, it is suggested that there is an urgent demand for new ways of thinking about democracy in a “free society”, as opposed to a “free market” (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Democracy and governance require more than just social choices made by voting within national boundaries and within limited terms, McIntyre-Mills (2010) argues. It requires processes responsive to ongoing socio-political, economic and environmental changes and the identity shifts that occur over generations (McIntyre-Mills, 2010). Progressive community development, particularly if it has an emphasis on activating ‘voice’ rather than managing diversity (Shaw & Martin 2000), can strengthen civil society by creating opportunities for the renewal of political and democratic life (Shaw 2011). Indeed, to solve our pressing ecological, economic and social concerns, reclaiming the *agora*, through community development processes that enable space for dialogue, critical thinking and imagination, seems to be one of society’s best hopes.

The dimensions of structure relevant to this discussion on democratic renewal have shown democratic society as comprising a number of ‘spheres’. Historically, citizenship, like other theoretical concepts relevant to community development, has been underpinned by varying political ideologies (Powell & Geoghegan 2005). It was argued that the current ideology, neo-liberalism, has overshadowed any that have come before. Economic structures and imperatives, including explanations for society’s problems and their solutions, have superseded other imperatives. The contemporary literature on community development and citizenship calls for a repoliticisation of citizenship, where active citizens have a voice about the kinds of societies in which they wish to live and leave for future generations. This kind of restructuring of society moves people and their concerns for health, social well-being, and ecological sustainability, from the periphery to the centre of political debates. It is suggested that community development has a pivotal role to play in this process.

Much of this historical overview is drawn from British and Australian literature, though not exclusively. With a history of colonisation by Britain, it is not surprising to see a number of traces or parallels between British practices of politics and community work, and our antipodean accounts. However, there are a number of points to be made that demonstrate the particularities of Australian community work and the social policy context within which it exists. These are discussed in the next section, providing a context for the current study.

3.3 Australian Community Work – An Overview

There is a long and rich history of Australian community work, particularly at the local level. (See for example, case study literature, Baldry & Vinson 1991; Halliwell 1969; Ingamells, Lathouras, Wiseman, Westoby & Caniglia 2010; Kelly, Morgan & Coghlan 1997; Kelly & Sewell 1986; Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992; Webster & Benger 1993; Weeks, Hoatson & Dixon 2003). Furthermore, many Australian case study examples of practice are published in the Australian community development journal, *Community Quarterly*, which was established in 1983. Now known as *New Community Quarterly* it is the only community development journal in Australia and aims to promote education regarding sustainable practices for community development, contributing to an ecologically and socially sustainable world.

Cooperatives and Friendly Societies

Community work in Australia can be traced back to the 1850s, when the first formal co-operatives and friendly societies were formed in Australia (see for example, Australian Unity 2008; Halladay 2001; Halladay & Peile 1989; Halladay, O'Connor & de Simone 1994). Prior to federation in 1901 and the establishment of social welfare policies and their associated financial payments, ordinary Australians faced with shared needs and with faith in the principle of mutual self-help, formed friendly societies. The first financial 'safety net' members made small weekly contributions to a common fund that paid benefits to members who became ill, lost work, or suffered hardship (Australian Unity 2008).

The first Australian cooperative was established in Queensland in 1859 (Cooperative Development Services 2012). Many of the older cooperatives were associated with agriculture and primary industries, for example, butter cooperatives and cotton gin cooperatives in rural Australia. Fuelled by the depression of the 1920s and 1930s and the need to survive financially or to build financial capital, people needed to cooperate. Unlike friendly societies, which have either been abandoned or de-mutualised and replaced by for-profit corporations, the cooperative movement remains a viable mechanism by which people can experience mutual self-help today (Halladay, 2001).

Australian Social Policy and the Welfare State

The powers of the federal government in social policy matters are limited to the Constitution (Jamrozik 2005). When the Constitution became law in 1901, social policy authorized the federal parliament to legislate on matters relating to “invalid and old-age pensions”, however, those provisions have now greatly increased (Jamrozik 2005:49). The concept of the welfare state takes the view that responsibility for the well-being of citizens does not, and should not lie with the individual, private entrepreneur or corporation, the family, or voluntary associations (Kenny 2011:155). The role of governments is to ensure the security and prosperity of their citizens by establishing protective structures, processes and institutions providing universal services and provisions in areas such as medical insurance, public housing, and social security (Kenny 2011).

However, the degree of universalism and residualism in government social expenditure has varied according to the philosophical perspectives of the two major political parties in Australia (Jamrozik 2005). There has been and continues to be a deep division in social philosophy between the conservative coalition of parties and the Australian Labor Party. Most advances in social legislation that have extended social provisions have occurred during times of federal Labor governments (Jamrozik 2005). Matters of the welfare state speak to the distribution of social rights in society on the principle of equality (Jamrozik 2005). Complete equality in all aspects of societal arrangements may be an unachievable objective, however, Jamrozik (2005) argues, the sustained striving towards reducing inequality through appropriate social policy demonstrates a commitment to welfare state principles. The subject of inequality is not just the purview of social policy. It can be seen as inextricably linked to social movements, which was a key feature of politics during the mid 20th Century.

The Rise of Activism and Social Reforms

The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of activism fuelled by the women’s movement, trade union activism, such as the inner city ‘green bans’ (see, Munday & Craig 1978), Aboriginal land rights, gay liberation, migrant rights and anti-Vietnam moratoria (Onyx 1996; Weeks, Hoatson and Dixon 2003). After an extended period of economic prosperity post WWII, the “combined effect of these social movements was to shock the nation’s complacency” about

injustice, poverty and oppression (Onyx 1996). The activist model is the one most clearly associated with some traditions of community development in Australia (Onyx 1996; Kenny 2011) and had its ascendancy with political and intellectual reinvigoration of the Australian Left in the 1970s (Kenny 2011), which was calling for radical social change (Ife & Tesoriero 2006).

Meekosha and Mowbray (1990) refer to the early 1970s as the period of “hope” for community development in Australia. The ferment of the 1960s had, for a few years at least, created mechanisms by which to channel its energy for reform and justice into planning and participation processes. During the term of the new federal Labor government (1972-1975) under Prime Minister Whitlam, one of these processes was resourced to provide for a national community development scheme through the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) (Kenny 2011:39). Programs funded through the AAP aimed to provide a coordinated regional approach for responding to people living in poverty (Whitlam 1972). The community development of the 1970s and early 1980s emerged as both a philosophy and as a political strategy for empowerment and social change (Onyx 1996). This period was characterised by a structural analysis, one which recognised that social structures had created inequality and disadvantage and, therefore, it was the responsibility of larger society to provide the resources to redress these (Onyx 1996).

Kelly (1980:49-50) writes about this phase of practice in Australia documenting the shift from “community work” in the 1960s to “community development” in the 1970s. This shift saw more emphasis placed on activism, where “groups sought power and were more revolutionary and reformist” in character (Kelly 1980:51).

We had a lot of different types of ‘guns’ but the establishment had more (Kelly 1980:51).

However, Kelly argues, what was missing from community development theorising at this time was “an alternative to ‘the gun’” (1980:51). This was the period during which, from a base at the University of Queensland, community development made links with the Indian sub-continent and drew from the Gandhian non-violence movement (Dasgupta 1980; Lathouras 2011). Kelly argued that the social forces required to achieve greater democracy and equity included the political, economic, legal, physical and moral. Regarding moral

forces, Kelly wrote, “The most amazing thing about non-violent moral coercion is its absolute strength” (1980:53). In terms of political forces, he declared “community development ought to test its revolutionary capacity by adherence to disciplined nonviolence” (Kelly 1980:53). This approach to community development is one synonymous with the society “we are attempting to achieve”, rather than being defined by forces of the establishment “we are attempting to rectify” (Kelly 1980:54). To this day, this philosophy and approach to practice has been sustained by academics and theorists based at the University of Queensland.

If the late 1960s and 1970s was the era of radicalism and progressive social change, the landscape in the mid 1980s took a decidedly conservative and restricted outlook with the emergence of New Right politics.

New Right Politics and Their Reforms

With the exception of some informal enclaves within particular programs such as public tenants’ organisations, Meekosha and Mowbray (1990:339) argued, there was, by the mid-1980s “no discernable radical position remaining in Australian community work”. Politically, this time in Australia’s history saw significant, far-reaching and lasting consequences, as witnessed by a worldwide trend of New Right politics and reform. This trend was led by neo-conservatives Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:5-8) but, subsequently, has been adhered to by political parties on the progressive side of politics as well. The 1980s saw the rise of the individual where citizens, within a neo-liberal framework and the market ‘logic’ birthed in this time period, were valued because they were producers or consumers (Kenny 2011).

Many of the issues that confronted welfare and community workers in the early 1980s remained through the 1990s (Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992). The New Right agenda has remained strong and, from within this paradigm, community development can be constructed as restoring family and individual responsibility, duty and obligation (Kenny 2011).

Contemporary Contexts and Practices

Jamrozik (2005) argues Australia is now considered a post-welfare state, as evidenced by the change of attitude towards social expenditure and, correspondingly, significant changes in social policy. While some measures introduced in previous periods are still in existence, they have been systematically eroded and their nature changed (Jamrozik 2005). Kenny (2011:155) concurs, naming the welfare state as “a failed promise”. It has come into disrepute since the mid-1980s because the welfare state’s promise of looking after the well-being of all its citizens has not been filled (Kenny 2011). There has been a sustained myth of egalitarianism in Australia, however its opposite is true, Jamrozik (2005) argues; Australia has always been a society of inequality – a class society.

The welfare “frame” has played a significant role in shaping work with communities in Australia, built around service provision in geographical locations across the country (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011: 55-57). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:3) argue that contemporary community work must be seen within the context of the crisis of the welfare state, one which has seen continuing cut-backs in public services, and has lowered the quality of service provision as overburdened workers are urged to “do more with less”.

While community development has always faced various dilemmas, it now faces a whole new range of complexities affecting community development practice (Kenny 2002). Kenny and her research colleagues argued that, the field of community development is in an era of “fused discourses”, where ideological influences abound and these create contexts for complex analysis in relation to practice (Brown, Kenny & Turner 2000). Furthermore, Ingamells (2006) argues, shifts in discourses have revamped the political landscape, where people are now governed, govern themselves and govern each other in new ways, requiring a new repertoire of community development strategies and techniques.

The rhetoric of marketisation dominates the funding for community work programs and has strong appeal when couched in terms of improving efficiency and productivity, and the belief that this provides better community development programs for communities (Kenny 2011). However, the realities of this logic are incompatible with community development principles of social justice and self-determination because, when community programs are commodified, disadvantaged groups become less empowered and more marginalised (Kenny 2011). With an emphasis on “new managerialism” within this frame, a competitive businesslike approach, which emphasises efficiency, productivity and risk management, is

profoundly problematic for community organisations engaging in community development (Kenny 2011:72).

There is no doubt that the current neo-liberal environment is creating many challenges for funded community development. Pearce (2010) argues whether social change can be fundable at all, given the emphasis on professionalised practice and bureaucratic processes. She argues that non-Government organisations in receipt of funding for community development are embedded in “a structural dilemma”, one where they need to make choices about their role in social change processes (Pearce 2010). The way in which organisations analyse power and position themselves as agents of change is pivotal for just change in contemporary contexts (Pearce 2010).

Furthermore, Burkett (2011) provides a hopeful response for organising within a robust neo-liberal context when she argues that resistance against hegemonic structures can take many forms. She sets out five responses, two which are less positive, and include an attitude in which people claim to be “a victim of the system” or acquiesce to the system, claiming it cannot be changed (Burkett 2011). Three more proactive responses include outright opposition, creating small-scale alternatives to the market economy, and engaging with the system to create change (Burkett 2011). The latter involves linking to and developing understandings of the market and its neo-liberal ideology in order to deliver outcomes of social justice (Burkett 2011). This is “a time of possibilities”, Burkett (2011) argues, and requires progressive practitioners to respond to current dilemmas and contexts in the spirit of idealism and creativity, and with clarity of purpose couched within a strong values base.

Ife and Tesoriero (2006:332-334) problematise the notion of community work as a profession, by asking who has access to specialised knowledge through training, and what that means for skill-sharing and empowerment processes in communities. Issues associated with paid practitioners located within the apparatus of the state and its managerialist agendas have been discussed. However, while it is not necessary for a community worker to have any formal education or training, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:332) argue that many different professionals employ a community development perspective, including community-oriented social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, nurses, lawyers and teachers. In Australia, specific vocational courses in community development are taught in vocational colleges and universities. Although the quantity varies widely, Schools of Social Work at

Australian universities are required to include some community work education, this being a standard of social work's professional body (Australian Association of Social Work 2008:11).

Taking stock of contemporary Australian community development education and practice, *New Community Quarterly's* editor laments the lack of "official" support for the practice, and its minimal representation in social work and other curricula, particularly in relation to societal-structural impediments to realise the practice's ideals (Boulet 2010). However, in a more optimistic vein, Boulet (2010) also refers to a thriving and growing "alternative" sphere, in areas such as co-housing, peace and non-violence work, permaculture, and social enterprises. Burkett (2008) also discusses the trend to re-localisation in Australia, as seen in the Transition Town movement. Other neighbourhood-based initiatives are seen associated with neighbourhood houses and learning centres (see for example, Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association 2011; Caniglia & Trotman, 2011; West End Community House 2011).

The Australian political context is full of inconsistency. For example, on one hand, we have a political context that allowed for the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's historic 2007 apology to the Stolen Generations. This apology was directed to Indigenous Australians who were on the receiving end of successive governments' policies, which led to a significant gap in health, education and housing standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On the other hand, at the same time, the federal government introduced the Northern Territory "Emergency Response" intervention to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse and family violence (Australian Government 2007). This policy was critiqued as needing substantial change for the measures to be consistent with Australia's international human rights obligations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007). Currently, the Australian Government has plans to further extend the policy's powers. Activist groups working for justice, rights and reconciliation argue these reforms will further undermine the human rights of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (see for example, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation 2012).

Community development in Australia, also, continues to be full of paradox and contestation (Kenny 2011). In a context of such contestation, gaining collective analyses about the political context and other aspects of practice seems imperative. Meekosha and Mowbray

(1995) argued there is little prospect for collective resistance, because Australian community work is divided, organisationally and politically. Dixon, Hoatson and Weeks (2003) argue those interested in this field do not readily get the opportunity to hear or share stories of practice, nor reflect and analyse together about the effectiveness of their practice. This type of practice-reflection is essential in the education of practitioners, as well as being the best basis for building new practice theory (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

In conclusion, historical accounts of Australian community development are similar to those found in other post-industrialised countries. Australia's colonial background may have created a particularly strong pioneering and labour-oriented ethic. However, in the latter quarter of the 20th Century, global political trends have affected Australian governments and their governance strategies as they have elsewhere. The predominant sphere for funded community work is found in local government and social and human service settings; however, this is couched within a welfare frame, which is driven by neo-liberal ideology. The country's track record for dealing with human rights issues and matters of justice has been particularly shameful, attested to by cyclic patterns of progressive politics and reform followed by conservative backlash and reform. Although there is a reasonable body of practice literature about community development, it pales into insignificance compared with other bodies of literature, such as social work practice and research. Furthermore, the literature often relates to localised practice and case study stories, and does not necessarily make strong connections to political dimensions of practice or to theorising.

3.4 Summarising the Concept of 'Structure' and the Community Development Literature

Chapter Two commenced with Lefebvre's (2002) discussion of "structure", which he argued has been highly elaborated. It has been shown that structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used within a range of perspectives across the natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy and discipline-specific fields. Furthermore, Lefebvre (2002) argued that the broad applicability of the term results in confusion about its meaning and usage.

Foundational sociological theories - macro and micro-level theories, and theories that attempt to bridge or connect the two levels were also explored in Chapter Two. Macrosociological theories look at large-scale patterns in society and include ideas associated with politics, economics, and how people are structurally located, for example, their class. The concept of structure from this perspective is that it is imposed or has primacy over the individual. Macrosociological theories also relate to ideas about power differentials in society where structure is conceived as a struggle for power. Microsociological theories look at small-scale social interactions or patterns of behaviour between people, and also how people make meaning or interpret their social world. From this perspective, the concept of structure is seen as a metaphor, where people interpret concepts and make sense of those interpretations individually or collectively.

Critiques of both macro and micro-level theories relate to their binary nature. Binary logic is the type of social logic that views two factors as separate, mutually inconsistent or contradictory (Kelly & Sewell 1988). For example, macro theories have been accused of determinism or essentialism because they cannot explain the diversity that exists within people's lives (Bottero 2010). In a similar fashion, micro theories are critiqued because they ignore the larger issues of power and structure within society and how these serve to constrain individual action (Giddens 2009).

Theorists attempting to bridge the macro-micro dilemma call for a more dialectic type of logic (Ritzer 2011). Dialectic logic is "a logic of dialogue" between two factors, that is, a logic that appreciates interrelationships between factors, including those that are harmonious and those that are contradictory (Kelly & Sewell 1988:17). Social theories that attempt to bridge these binary positions explore both objective and subjective ontological positions. They provide debates concerning human action and social structure and the extent to which consensus and conflict are considered factors within the social world (Giddens 2009).

These types of theorising are mirrored in the community development literature. This chapter provided a historical account of the various theoretical epochs within community development. Importantly, how one understands the purpose of community development influences how various theoretical positions are privileged or restricted. For example, with consensus theories, the purpose of community development emphasises personal transformation without necessarily considering broader structural social change. This

compares with pluralist and structuralist theories located at the macro-level. These also sit within conflict theories, that is, with an analysis of inequality. From this perspective, the purpose of community development is, to varying degrees, broader structural change to redress inequality. Specific theories attempting to bridge micro-macro levels are those that connect local projects with broader social movements (Ledwith 2011), and also include theories such as bridging social capital and meta-networking (Gilchrist 2009).

Postmodernist theories, as they relate to community development, provided perspectives with a greater dialectical prospect, and occur when one thinks about how power is produced and reproduced in communities. A greater dialectical prospect also occurs when one thinks about the diversity of participants in community development, how multiple ‘truths’ exist amongst people, and also how agency is created or increased from these standpoints. Totalizing or grand narratives, and how social positioning is determined, are destabilised when adopting perspectives from a postmodern theoretical position. However, it is fair to say that these perspectives could be applied to any articulation of community development’s purpose. The discussion focused on concepts such as nuance, balance and transformation, and these concepts are readily applicable to practice with differing aims. Hence, the discussion provided a salient warning not to abandon political principles, goals and strategies to achieve a better society (Kenny 2011). Ledwith (2011), arguing from a critical theoretical perspective, claims that community development’s purpose is best served by treading a fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, one that has an emancipatory agenda.

Many parallels over time could be drawn between the community development literature and other bodies of literature regarding the concept of structure. Significantly, Mills’ (1959/2010:7) “sociological imagination”, a concept that looks for relationships between micro-level *personal troubles* and macro-level *public issues*, sits very comfortably with community development practice. A number of theorists in the discussion referred to community development practice as a creative act. From this perspective, it is a practice that considers the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions (Popple & Quinney 2002), through a process of “imagined futures” (Ledwith 2011:70). This is to create “the world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). This kind of imagination and constructionism posits a proactive view of people who struggle for and create meaning via action in the world (Parton & O’Byrne 2000:173). That is not to say that *every* construction is equally valid.

However, in the dialectic conversation, possibilities are explored, providing a bridge between the objective and subjective, or the real and the constructed (Parton & O’Byrne 2000). Therefore, dialectical spaces established through community development process-work can be described as sites for both creativity and pro-activity.

3.5 Implications for this Research

This literature review has made explicit issues concerning the theory-practice divide for structural community development. The community development field has a body of theoretical literature readily available to it. However, empirical studies that have theorised an effective approach remain limited. Kenny (2002) argued that one of the big challenges still to be met for community development was the identification of effective strategies to launch the symbolic, ideological, and *micro-structural* processes that challenge the ongoing subjugation that occurs in everyday life. Discussed earlier in this chapter, Ledwith (2011:110) argues a reluctance to theorising from practice is one of the “sticking points” facing contemporary practice, and is reducing community development’s critical potential.

Writing most recently in the Australian context, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue the critical importance of practitioners’ knowing that their practice is making a difference. Despite four decades of concerted work with communities across Australia (since the field was identifiable in social policy contexts), very little is known about what actually works (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). They argue, “If we do not begin to build a body of knowledge about working with communities, we are doomed to repeat our practice of trial and error indefinitely” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:98). Indeed, the opening discussion in their book on critical perspectives of community practice states,

Like other practitioners and academics, we have been shocked and frustrated at the lack of Australian *published* ideas, thoughts and practice wisdom about working with communities” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:2, their emphasis).

Ife (2010) argues the relationship between theory and practice is both problematic and complex, where the two can be seen as binary opposites, that is, where one is either a theoretician or a practitioner. He claims that theory and practice cannot be understood

separately as they are part of each other; therefore, practice divorced from theory leads to an “unthinking anti-intellectualism”, where the practitioner does not ask ‘what’ or ‘why’, but only ‘how’ (Ife 2010:208). Such practice, Ife (2010) argues, is potentially dangerous and counter-productive. On the other hand, to privilege knowledge from experts, who use complex language to talk about ideas, is to marginalize the wisdom of the community (Ife 2010). Moreover, practice needs to be grounded in theory, and theorising involves searching for more than what might seem like “common sense” or “common knowledge” (Ife 2010:209). It also means searching for the “uncommon sense” and “uncommon knowledge” (Ife 2010:209). This kind of theorising, Ife (2010) argues, expands our worldview and helps us ask new questions and seeks new answers, where theory is built up from critical engagement with lived experience.

This study attempts to make some progress towards rectifying the enduring theory-practice divide for structural community development. To a degree, the literature has provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. The term normative refers to what one *should* do in a given situation (Banks & Williams 2005; Mikkelsen 2005). However, what is needed is a contribution to the literature in-situ, that is, in the place where practice occurs. This constructivist idea, about what *could* happen (Mikkelsen 2005), aims to see how practitioners are making sense of a theory of structure. Therefore, the aim of this study is to construct a theory ‘from below’ about structure and community development.

The following chapter justifies and describes the methodological approach taken in this study. It discusses that an iterative theory-building process has been undertaken throughout this study. This has involved distilling normative theoretical ideas about structure from the literature in Chapters Two and Three, and subsequent theory-building from below, based on both empirical and constructivist frames of reference reported in the data analysis chapters. A conceptual framework is needed that enables the theory-building aim of this study. A research project’s conceptual framework is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform one’s research (Maxwell 2005). The following section outlines the conceptual framework employed throughout this study.

3.5.1 Conceptual Framework

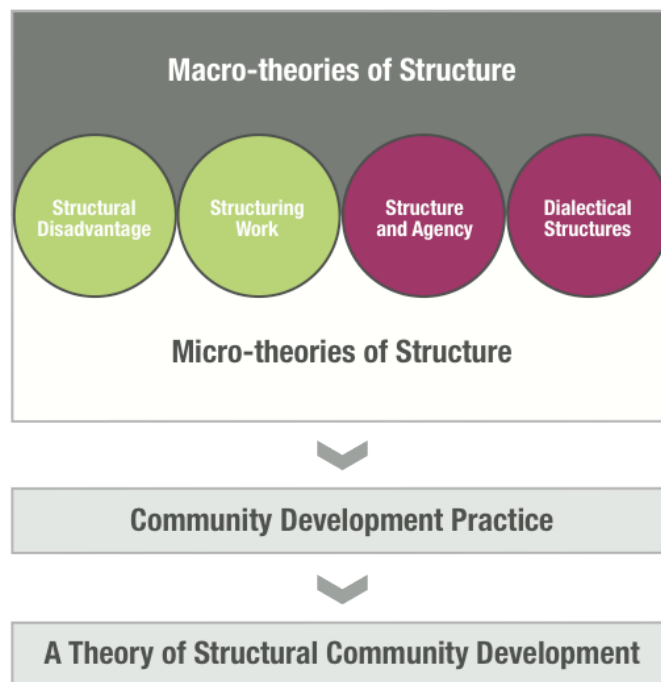
Maxwell (2005:33) describes a conceptual framework as a “tentative theory”, or in other words, what one thinks is going on in the area one intends to investigate. The purpose of the tentative theory is to inform the study’s design, to assess and refine goals, to develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats to the study’s conclusions (Maxwell 2005:33-34).

Marshall and Rossman (2011), citing Schram (2006:63), argue that the task of designing a conceptual framework involves “uncovering what is relevant and what is problematic among the ideas circulating around the problem, making new connections, and then formulating an argument that positions one to address that problem”. Subsequently, this process leads to the research design, which describes how the study will be conducted and showcases the writer’s ability to conduct the study (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

The research design section for this study is discussed in the following chapter. In that chapter, the epistemological approach taken in this study is justified. The literature review highlighted the contested and fragmented understandings of concepts of structure and issues of practice redressing inequality. Hence, this study warrants a hybrid of two underpinning epistemological paradigms. It draws from a social constructionist approach to knowledge generation, and this knowledge is viewed through a critical theory lens. These theoretical standpoints are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Methodology.

Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study encompasses both constructivist and critical theoretical positions and can be located within broader macrosociological and microsociological theorising. See diagram below, (Figure 1), the conceptual framework for this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework diagram shows there are *six elements* inherent within the framework. The first two elements include: *macro-theories of structure* and *micro-theories of structure*. These theories have been discussed in Chapter Two, and this chapter has shown that community development theory can be located at either or both macro and micro levels of society.

The second set of elements includes theories well known to the community development literature: the *theory of structural disadvantage* and theories for methods and approaches to '*structuring*' the work of community development. Structural disadvantage has been discussed in this chapter in relation to critical and structural theories of community development. Methods and approaches to community development have also been discussed in this chapter. However, it has been argued that when making linkages between micro and macro levels community development theories are lesser known.

Thirdly, there are two other pertinent elements. These have not featured prominently in the community development literature, but are found in sociological and political science literatures. They include: *the theories of structure and agency* and theories concerning

dialectical structures. Both these perspectives can be beneficial to community development, particularly because dialectical structures are those that invite deliberation and create agency.

The application of these six theoretical lenses to community development practice aligns with the epistemological positioning of this study, one that holds both a critical theoretical perspective and a social constructionist perspective. Viewing practice through this framework will enable the researcher to meet the study's overall aim, that is, to construct a theory of structural community development.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical overview of community development literature and made links to the concept 'structure' as seen in sociological literature. With a critical reading of historical perspectives, it has been shown that various epochs of theory and practice have been driven by ideology across the political spectrum and this has created both theoretical continuities and discontinuities over time. Australian community work, the context for this study, mirrors the complexity of theoretical positions seen in other post-industrialised countries. It is argued that a theory-practice divide exists in relation to micro-structural aspects of community development. In addition, little literature exists about the ways in which practitioners understand and theorise these concepts. Community development has not fully integrated diverse thinking about structure into its praxis. Therefore, these important topics warrant investigation. The next chapter outlines the methodological approach for the study to enable links between the theoretical understandings of structure in the literature and practitioners' understandings of structure in their community development work.

CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology for Exploring Structural Community Development

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in the study. It describes the research processes used to develop links between the theoretical understandings of structure in the literature, and practitioners' understandings of these or other theoretical understandings that have a bearing on practitioners' work.

The next section of this chapter discusses the epistemological approach taken in the study and restates the research questions in relation to these epistemological positions. The third section of this chapter locates the study within a tradition of social research, namely, practitioner research (Fox, Martin & Green 2007). The fourth section outlines the research design, justifying a two-staged process. The fifth section details the methods that were used in the study and the sixth section discusses the particular form used in the data analysis, that is, the way in which the results of the analysis are developed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The seventh and final section discusses the limitations of the research design and methods.

4.2 Epistemological Approach

In Chapter Three, arguments were put about the contested nature of community development practice and the issues that existed because of a theory-practice divide regarding the concept 'structure'. Contestation exists because of the various and fragmented theoretical underpinnings, the various policy contexts and practice approaches, and the language that is embedded in and surrounds community development practice. How community development practitioners interpret or make sense of this contestation should be examined. Therefore, the use of a qualitative research approach to this study is justified, as it locates the participant as expert, based on their experience in the real world and their interpretations and understanding of concepts.

Moreover, from where I sit as a researcher and past practitioner, community development is a practice that has an emancipatory agenda. Research that enables the emancipatory agenda of community development is useful and entirely worthwhile.

The two assumptions introduced above, the contested and fragmented understandings of concepts of structure and issues of practice redressing inequality, feed into a hybrid of two epistemological paradigms underpinning this study. The study takes a social constructionist approach to knowledge generation, however the knowledge generated can be viewed through a critical theory lens.

The first paradigm, a constructionist orientation, assumes people construct reality out of their interactions and beliefs (Neuman 2011:102). Therefore, because different practitioners interpret the concepts surrounding structure and practice differently, it is acknowledged that multiple realities exist for practitioners and these need to be investigated. Secondly, community development can be seen as problematic because some versions or constructions of it lack critical analysis. Research from a critical social science perspective aims not to just study the social world but to change it (Neuman 2011:108).

The critical research paradigm, Neuman (2011:109) argues, seeks to “critique and transform social relations by revealing the underlying sources of social relations, and to empower people, especially less powerful people”. Like some forms of community development, with their emphasis on root causes of oppression, critical approaches to research not only look at the surface level, or the observable empirical layer of social reality, but how that observable reality is generated. These realities, Neuman explains, are generated by structures and causal mechanisms that operate at deeper, unobservable layers (2011:109). Moreover, the critical social science paradigm states that, although subjective meaning is important, there are real, objective conditions that shape social relations (Neuman 2011:110). The critical researcher probes social situations and places them in a larger historical context (Neuman 2011:110), where the nature of social relations has changed over time.

Creswell (2003:9) places critical theory alongside other theoretical perspectives, such as feminist perspectives, radicalised discourses, queer theory and disability inquiry, and labels this knowledge-making as “advocacy / participatory” research approaches. Creswell (2003) argues that, historically, the advocacy/participatory (or emancipatory) writers have drawn on

the works of Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas and Freire, and more contemporary theorists (see for example, Fay 1987; Heron & Reason 1997). These writers have, in the main, proposed that the constructivist stance did not go far enough in advocating for an action agenda to help marginalised peoples. This type of research inquiry has a political agenda, and needs to contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which people work or live and the researcher's life (Creswell 2003). Moreover, this type of research assumes that the inquirer will proceed collaboratively, where participants will help with the research design and analysis, and provide a vehicle for a united "voice" for reform and change (Creswell 2003).

In order to hold both of these epistemological perspectives together, a methodology was needed that would achieve two purposes – research processes for meaning making, and processes for critical reflection and praxis. Processes for meaning-making involved undertaking in-depth interviews with practitioners and the analysis of those interviews. Processes to develop collective critical analysis and action, or praxis, occurred through group meetings with previously interviewed practitioners. Praxis can be described as "critical thinking and dialogue".... "that seek(s) to challenge conventional explanations of everyday life while, at the same time, considering the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions" (Poppo & Quinney 2002). Neuman's definition of praxis is "a way to evaluate explanations...in which theoretical explanations are put into real-life practice and the outcome used to refine explanation" (Neuman 2011:133). A number of community development theorists argue that acknowledging the dialogical emphasis of praxis is an appropriate approach when theorising practice (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; McIntyre 1996; Mikkelsen 2005; Poppo & Quinney 2002). Therefore, the dialogical group processes with practitioners (known as "Stage Two") became an important component for the theory building exercise.

Linking the theoretical foundations of structure within community development and other literatures and the actual practice of community development to gain understanding about social reality and its structural dimensions is the topic area of this study. Eliciting data to gain these insights comprised five key research questions:

1. How do practitioners think about structure in their work?

2. How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice?
3. What frameworks for practice emerged from the data?
4. What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?
5. What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

These research questions, particularly questions 1-3, clearly demonstrate the social constructionist paradigm underpinning them. However, at interview, not just *any* questions were asked about community development practice. With a critical lens, the kinds of questions asked in the semi-structured interviews reflected a critical social science paradigm, particularly when focusing on community development as a practice to redress structural disadvantage. For example, one of the questions at interview included, "What role do you see community development having in relation to disadvantaged people?" Likewise, a critical stance was reflected in the analysis seeking more effective practice outcomes in order to develop a *useful* theory of structural community development. This stance is particularly evident in research questions 4 and 5.

Because structural dimensions of community development are many, and because practitioners are required to interpret meaning as they engage with their world, investigation into these phenomena necessitated the use of a qualitative methodology to find answers to the research questions posed (Marshall & Rossman 2011:2-3). The knowledge base, regarding a structural approach to community development, is drawn from practitioners in their contexts. Therefore, this research can be located with the tradition of social research known as practitioner research, discussed in the next section.

4.3 A Practitioner Research Study

McLeod (1999) defines practitioner research as research carried out by practitioners for the purposes of advancing their own practice. Thus, this study can be characterised as

‘practitioner research’. In Chapter One a personal narrative told the story of my community development practitioner experience prior to commencing this study. Fox, Martin and Green (2007) argue practitioner research is fundamentally no different to other forms of research that are about generating new knowledge. However, practitioner researchers are different as a result of their unique position in the research process.

Practitioner research provides a vehicle for practitioners to examine their practice and challenge the assumptions on which that practice is constructed....The practitioner researcher thinks about practice and research from a position that is different to academic researchers (Fox et al. 2007:197).

Neuman concurs, arguing that social science research is not just for “college classrooms and professors” (2011:1), but a range of professionals and others who apply various scientific methods to improve our understanding of the social world, and its operation. Such practitioners might be used to help solve problems or to expand future knowledge and understanding (Neuman 2011:16).

Practitioner researchers discuss practice knowledge as it relates to research. Fox et al., (2007) argue that practitioners draw on four forms of professional knowledge in practice – propositional knowledge, based on theory and research that guides practice; process knowledge, which includes skills that enable the practice to occur and be effective; personal knowledge, which draws on previous practice experience; and value-based knowledge, which relates to the moral and ethical values and beliefs one holds (Fox et al. 2007:26).

Just as experienced practitioners draw on these forms of knowledge in practice, practitioner researchers, undertaking research into practice, also use these different forms of knowledge when developing research proposals (Fox et al. 2007). However, when thinking critically about theory and practice, Fox et al. (2007) argue that practitioner researchers should be prepared to place themselves *outside* practice in order to understand the propositional knowledge driving practice within the research field. In addition, practitioner researchers should seek the support of a research supervisor who will challenge their understanding of practice throughout the research process (Fox et al. 2007).

Darlington and Scott (2002:5) highlight certain difficulties associated with practice and research, referring to “the research-practitioner split”. Discussing qualitative research in human service practice contexts, they argue that the world of research and the world of practice have remained fairly separate, where propositions about practice issues have been located in the realm of tacit knowledge, those derived from experience (Darlington & Scott 2002). Practitioners are often intimidated and alienated by the very notion of ‘research’, they argue, particularly because of its association with objective science. Practitioners may view objective science as incompatible with subjective concepts associated with practice, that is, the messiness of practice contexts involving people (Darlington & Scott 2002: 4-5). However, bridging the gap between theory and practice is the aim of Darlington and Scott’s text (a piece of research in its own right). This work highlights how practice research can improve practice, be influential at a program level or even impact politically, depending on the context and the way findings are disseminated.

Alston and Bowles (2003), discussing research in the social work field, argue that all research should lead to change at some level, whether in deepened theoretical understanding, or in the world of policy and practice. Scanlon (2000) concurs, arguing the purpose of practitioner research is to make a contribution to a particular discipline, or to address a particular practice problem, or to inform policy.

Mikkelsen (2005), an author of participatory development studies, suggests a framework for knowledge formulation which is useful. The framework seeks knowledge with an empirical frame of reference, by asking ‘what *is* happening’; a constructionist frame of reference, by asking ‘what *could* happen’; and a normative frame of reference, by asking ‘what *should* happen or *ought* to happen’ (Mikkelsen 2005:127). This framework applies to this study, in the sense that the in-depth interviews elicited from practitioners provided information about ‘what is happening in practice’, from their own perspectives. The group meeting processes elicited ‘what could happen’, when practitioners reflected on the key elements of structural community development practice, theorising together about opportunities and overcoming constraints. The third part of Mikkelsen’s (2005) framework, what should or ought to happen, is discussed in the discussion / conclusion chapter, where propositions are made about a theory of structural community development.

Maxwell (2005:15), discussing research more generally, argues that researchers need to have a clear understanding of the “goals” of their research. He defines goals as “motives, desires and purposes”, across “personal”, “practical” and “intellectual (or scholarly)” domains (Maxwell 2005:16). Having clear goals is important because they shape decisions about the research design, they determine how interpretations and theories are created, and they ensure researchers do not spend undue effort doing things that do not advance those goals (Maxwell 2005).

From my stance as a practitioner, the goals of this study are about improving community development practice in two ways. In a practical sense, the research relates to how structural community development practice may better achieve its goals. In an intellectual sense, the research seeks to discover empirical evidence about how practitioners re-theorise the various propositions found in the theoretical literature about structural practice, as well as theorise new approaches to practice. The research design overview is presented in the next section, and highlights the processes used to achieve these goals.

4.4 Research Design Overview

To support the qualitative, practitioner-led nature of this research, processes to support inductive reasoning were employed. An iterative (Patton 2002) and inductive approach was used from the literature review, through to data collection and analysis, to the writing of the thesis. Iterative refers to an approach in which each step of the research, from beginning to end, has informed the development of the next step, but has also related back to the previous step. Inductive reasoning is an approach to developing or confirming theory that begins with concrete empirical evidence and works towards more abstract concepts and theoretical relationships (Neuman 2011:70).

The study employed a two-staged research process, which involved in-depth semi-structured interviews and consensus conference processes. These are introduced here, but discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The first stage involved the completion of twenty-two in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello et al. 2008:51) with community development practitioners in two Australian

states. The goal of these interviews was to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of ‘structure’.

The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise known as consensus conferences (Minichiello et al. 2008:161). Consensus conferences are workshops or discussion groups where participants are brought together in order to come to consensus after interaction, debate and further discussion. Jones and Hunter (1995), and McNeil (2000), state that this method is often used with practitioners from a particular field who are trying to make decisions in situations where there is either insufficient information, or where there is an overload of (often contradictory) information. This process is also used by large organisations that are attempting to set policy or a forward direction for their workforce. For example, it is used by the United Nations (Kaufmann 1980); and large religious bodies such as the Uniting Church in Australia for their annual state Synod Council conferences and their triennial national Assembly Council conferences (Tabart 2003).

Two groups were held with practitioners who had previously been interviewed during Stage One. These practitioners explored the fourth research question, and engaged in the construction of what a theory of structural community development *could* be (Mikkelsen 2005).

The aim of using the consensus conference group method in this study was to determine the extent to which practitioners, whom Sniderman (1999) considers as “experts”, agreed about particular issues. The consensus conference processes gained agreement about salient issues and concepts, and also gained agreement on matters in which there were dissenting or divergent views. For example, the group did not agree about particular factors that are drivers for community change processes, as individual participants had different experiences about these particular phenomena. If there was not full consensus in the first instance, the process sought to reach agreement about divergent opinions on the subject matter, thereby capturing the breadth and depth of opinion on the issues being considered.

Towards the end of both group meetings, a nominal group technique (Minichiello et al. 2008:160) was used to assist in data formulation, and to answer the fourth research question. A nominal group technique is a structured (Fontana & Frey 2000:651) and controlled process, where participants are asked to rank ideas in terms of importance (Minichiello et al.

2008:160). It assists in capturing a range of opinions and also gives all participants equal opportunity to provide input.

In summary, this research has employed an iterative and inductive approach to knowledge-building. In the process of dialogue between participants and myself, new understandings of structure and community development practice were distilled.

4.5 The Methods

This section discusses the specific research processes that were undertaken throughout the study. It is presented as a series of sub-sections, including:

- Criteria for choosing participants;
- Sampling processes;
- Description of the sample;
- Gaining consent to participate;
- Conducting Stage One interviews;
- Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference groups;
- Ethical issues;
- Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data.

4.5.1 Criteria for Choosing Participants

Participants were selected against a range of specific criteria. The two criteria considered essential for all participants were, firstly, that they were currently working in the field of community development and, secondly, that they needed to have had three or more years experience as community development practitioners.

These criteria were considered essential, as the “key informants” (O’Leary 2005:83) of this study, considered as experts or insiders, needed to have current knowledge of the field. There was also an assumption that the type of work being researched required a range of skill

and practice experience, not necessarily held by ‘beginning’ practitioners; hence the stipulation of three or more years experience.

In addition to these essential criteria, it was considered important that participants were drawn from urban, regional and rural contexts. This is known as a “stratified sample” (Neuman 2011:256), which offers the greatest variety of perspective across a finite group of participants. Specific quotas for participant numbers were sought from each of these three categories in the following proportion. Ideally, half the number of participants would be drawn from urban contexts and the other half would be drawn from regional or rural contexts. This was justified because of the likelihood that regional and rural practitioners would employ different practice approaches. For example, due to the lack of access to services readily available in urban areas, out of necessity, regional infrastructure is built as part of community development practice.

Other areas of diversity in the sample were also sought, although quotas were not applied. Firstly, participants would be employed by both Non-Government agencies and Government agencies. Secondly, participants would represent a mix of fields or contexts, for example, neighbourhood or local work contexts; regional or peak body work; or specialised work contexts, such as micro-finance or working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The summary table below (Table 1) details the criteria for choosing participants in the study.

Table 1: Criteria for Choosing Participants

Criteria for Choosing Participants		
Priority	Criteria Detail	Quotas Sought
Essential	Current workers in the CD field	All participants
	Three or more years of practice experience	
Important	Urban	10
	Regional and Rural	10
Desired	Diverse fields of employment and diverse employers, eg. Non-government or Government	As available

While this sample does not exhaustively represent all community development practitioners, as much diversity as possible, using these criteria, was sought to make up the sample.

4.5.2 Sampling Processes to find Participants

The first stage of the research involved recruiting and selecting participants. A range of sampling processes was used including Purposive, Convenience and Snowballing techniques.

Purposive sampling is used in exploratory research to select cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman 2011). It is “a nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population” (Neuman 2011:268).

From the outset, it was decided that participants would be recruited from two Australian states, Queensland and Victoria. Recruiting from these particular states is an example of purposive sampling (Mason 2002) and was justified for the following reasons.

Each state has multiple ‘traditions’ (Westoby & Hope-Simpson 2010) of community development practice approaches and therefore different nuances of practice. For example, a

very specific approach to structural community development practice has been taught at the University of Queensland for the past 35 years and has been pivotal in the education of many Queensland practitioners. In contrast, a number of prominent Australian community development theorists are located in Victoria¹. These theorists have had a sustained radical power analysis and critique, which have been pivotal in the education of Victorian practitioners.

Both states have annual or bi-annual community development conferences, providing opportunities for practitioners to gain professional development and to develop some collective practice analysis. Additionally, the history of funding for community development is different in each state and these realities have generated differing approaches to development work.

The marked contrast between practice approaches in the two states underpinned their choice for recruitment to achieve a broad range of data. Focusing the sample within two distinct geographical areas also assisted with the practical implications for the Stage Two consensus conference groups. One group was held in each state. It was deemed more likely that participants would be able to attend a group if one was held in their geographic region. The use of teleconference facilities was used at the Queensland meeting to ensure those who wished to participate could do so without travelling great distances.

The participants were recruited in three ways. The first of these was by disseminating information through community development network email lists. Contact was made with the email list managers of the networks requesting their support to disseminate information about the study. These included the following formal networks: Borderlands Co-operative Inc.; the International Association of Community Development (Victorian Branch); the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres Inc. (ANHLC); the Community Centres and Family Support Network of Queensland Inc. (CCFSNAQ); and the Community Development Queensland (CD QLD) Network. A semi-formal network, the Western Suburbs Community Development Network (of Melbourne), was also used.

¹ For example, Sue Kenny (Deakin University); Martin Mowbray (RMIT University)

The responses to recruitment in Victoria were initially poor. At the time of recruitment, the 2009 Victorian “Black Saturday” bushfires had just occurred and anecdotal feedback indicated that many practitioners were preoccupied with community responses to the bush fires. This unexpected set of circumstances led to two other sampling techniques being used, that is, convenience sampling and snowballing sampling.

“Convenience” sampling (Bowers, House & Owens 2011:56) refers to recruiting cases in any manner that is convenient. Serendipitously, editions of the *New Community Quarterly* journal and the ANHLC newsletter were being disseminated during the recruitment phase of the study. Recruitment flyers advertising the research project were inserted into these publications. This strategy potentially exposed the research to people outside of the community development field. As a result, when people responded to the advertising, they were vetted and selected for participation using the same criteria as for those who responded to the community development networks’ email advertising.

Finally, because the email, flyer inserts and newsletter methods of dissemination had not elicited a response from any rural practitioners in Victoria, a “snowballing” technique (Bowers, House & Owens 2011:57-58) was employed. Snowball sampling is a method of sampling or selecting cases in a network or chain of people (Marshall & Rossman 2011; Neuman 2011). It employs a multistage technique (Neuman 2011), which identifies cases of interest from people who know people who may be information-rich (Marshall & Rossman 2011). The analogy of a snowball is used to describe this technique because a snowball may start out small in size but becomes larger as it rolls on wet snow and picks up additional snow (Neuman 2011). A Victorian practitioner in a regional community development role, who had already agreed to participate in the study, emailed rural Victorian practitioners with whom she had a relationship, drawing their attention to the research study advertising. Two rural participants in Victoria were recruited in this way.

Once potential participants responded to the advertising, they were telephoned. An “intake” form was used to record responses to demographic information including: name, CD practitioner job title; nature of their work; employing agency; years of experience; working in a paid or voluntary capacity; geographic location; highest qualification in their field; interest in being interviewed; contact details and how they heard about the research.

The responses for participation in Queensland outnumbered the responses in Victoria. All participants who responded and met the selection criteria in Victoria were interviewed. A small number of Queensland practitioners who had met the selection criteria and had shown an interest in the study were not interviewed. These people were dropped as potential participants as quotas were filled. A ‘first in’ selection process was used. That is, if they met the selection criteria, they were interviewed but if they responded after quotas were filled, they were not interviewed.

4.5.3 Description of the Sample

Interviews were conducted with twenty-two participants, of whom seven were men and fifteen were women. Two participants were from refugee backgrounds and one was an Indigenous Australian. The remaining participants were from European and Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

The original target was for ten Queenslanders and ten Victorians to be interviewed from a spread of urban, regional and rural contexts. Two Victorian rural practitioners were recruited last, after employing the snow-balling technique. Thus interviews took place with ten Queenslanders and twelve Victorians, a total of twenty-two participants. The targeted quota of half the participants from regional or rural areas was not attained. Of the twenty-two, fifteen participants were from urban settings working in Brisbane or Melbourne, four were from regional settings and three were from rural settings.

A pre-requisite to participate in this study was a minimum of three years community development practice experience. The majority of participants had significant years of experience, with some having practiced for forty years. The median number of practice years of this sample was 13.5 years.

Most participants had either an employment contract with the job title “CD worker” or a similar job title requiring them to employ community development practice approaches in their work. Three practitioners, one Victorian and two Queenslanders, were working in a voluntary capacity. However, these people were all associated with community service

agencies or other community development entities, which provided them with formal support in their roles.

A number of factors about the participants and their community development context were recorded. They included:

1. Their state (Queensland or Victoria), and their gender (male or female);
2. Contexts of practice:
 - Location of practice – urban, regional or rural.
 - Work in the context of ‘place’, such as work within a geographical community. This included: a local community (suburbs or towns) or a number of local communities across a region; work from a local government authority base, or an organisation such as a peak body or University; or work across a regional network of other CD practitioners or neighbourhood houses.
 - Various ‘communities of interest’, such as: Sudanese Australians from refugee backgrounds; migrants; aging community members and seniors groups; young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
 - Various ‘issue-specific’ contexts, such as community housing or working with people at risk of ill health.
 - Employing agency – Government or non-Government.
3. Years of practice experience.

A total of twenty-two community development practitioners, working in different types of contexts, were interviewed. The following table provides information about their practice contexts, their years of practice experience and other demographic details. See below, Table 2: Descriptions of Participants.

Table 2: Descriptions of Participants

Queensland CD practitioners / Gender	Contexts of Practice	Years of experience	Victorian CD practitioners / Gender	Contexts of Practice	Years of experience
Q1 F	Regional / Geographic / CALD / NGO	4	V1 M	Urban / Geographic / NGO	43
Q2 F	Regional / Geographic / NGO	15	V2 F	Urban / CALD / Indigenous / NGO	3
Q3 F	Regional / Housing / NGO	28	V3 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	10
Q4 M	Rural / Indigenous / NGO	16	V4 F	Urban / Network / NGO	15
Q5 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	30	V5 F	Urban / Network / Local Govt	10
Q6 F	Urban / Indigenous / NGO	7	V6 F	Urban / CALD / Local Govt	5
Q7 F	Urban / Aging / Peak Body / NGO	17	V7 F	Urban / Geographic / Local Govt	11
Q8 F	Regional / Geographic / NGO	4	V8 F	Urban / CALD / Indigenous /NGO	10
Q9 M	Urban / Youth / Local Govt	23	V9 M	Urban / Health / University	5
Q10 M	Urban / Geographic / Network / NGO	38	V10 M	Rural / Network / NGO	12
			V11 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	34
			V12 M	Rural / CALD / Local Govt	7

Key:

Male, Female (M, F)

Urban, Regional or Rural

Geographic - Work within a specific geographic community (see above).

Focus on particular groups of community members eg CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds), Indigenous, young people, older people, or networks of other practitioners / neighbourhood houses

Issue specific – eg health, community housing

Employing agency – NGO (non-Government organization) eg. co-operative, CD association, neighbourhood centre, or larger state-wide or national NGO with a locality focus; local government; peak body (an organization that represent its member organizations); or university

4.5.4 Gaining Consent to Participate

All participants who were chosen were provided with an information sheet detailing the aim of the research and its processes. See Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet. They were also provided with an interview consent form. The consent form sought the participant's consent to be interviewed and for the researcher to record the interview using an audio digital recorder. See Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form. The signed consent form was collected at the commencement of each interview.

4.5.5 Conducting the Stage One Interviews

The interviews were conducted over a seven-month period, March 2009 to September 2009. Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted in a location most suitable to the participant, usually their place of employment. Two telephone interviews were conducted with rural and regional Queensland practitioners. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 112 minutes. The face-to-face and telephone forms of interviewing were qualitatively different as face-to-face interactions draw on both visual and verbal communication. I am satisfied that both the face-to-face and telephone interviews were of a similar standard and met the requirements for this study.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello et al. 2008) were held to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of 'structure'. A detailed interview guide (Minichiello et al. 2008) was developed (See Appendix 3, Stage One Interview Guide). The guide was developed to raise general topics for discussion without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions (Minichiello et al. 2008:90), allowing flexibility to explore topics and issues dialogically with the participants. Furthermore, Patton (2002) argues that interview guides are useful to focus on and illuminate various subject matter within the limited timeframe of an interview. However, their limitation is that important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted. To circumvent this, opportunities for other matters outside of the interview guide were explored during the interview process. An active interviewing style was employed, one which sought to probe for clarification and elaboration, and distill meaning (Minichiello et al. 2008).

The aims of the questions asked at interview were four-fold:

- To gain an understanding of the practitioners' work settings, their main tasks and the purpose of their work;
- To gain an understanding of participants' conceptualisation of structural dimensions of practice. These were first explored in a very general sense, for example, "If I was to say the word 'structure', what comes to mind about your practice?" Then followed exploration of more specific concepts found in the literature, for example, 'disadvantage', 'citizenship' and 'transformation', and how practice may or may not have a bearing on these concepts.
- To gain an understanding of the main approaches or methods participants are using to achieve their practice goals. This included both critical inputs and barriers to achieving their practice goals.
- To gain an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of practice. Participants were asked about the challenges they were currently facing, as well as any opportunities that were emerging for their practice at the time of the interview.

The interviews used a "funneling" questioning style (Minichiello et al. 2008:94-95), whereby the interviewer controls the flow of the information being sought. The interviews start with questions of a broad and general nature. Later, more specific and potentially challenging questions are asked towards the end of the interview, once rapport is built (Minichiello et al. 2008). Hence, questions about current challenges for practice were asked towards the end of the interview.

Another questioning technique used throughout the interview was the use of storytelling. It is a device used to parallel an ordinary conversation, and involves an extended monologue in which the interviewer takes the role of active listener (Minichiello et al. 2008). The technique was used at times to follow up a specific question in which a more theoretical concept had been explored, and to provide an illustration of how that theoretical concept was enacted in real life. For example, Appendix 4 is an excerpt of an interview where the

participant was asked if they could share a story about how processes of community development had enabled people to overcome disadvantages or marginalisation. See Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews.

4.5.5.1 Recording of the Interviews

The interviews were all recorded using a digital recorder, with prior permission having been gained from each participant. During the interview, the researcher wrote notes about points of interest made by the participants, particularly if something needed to be clarified. Rather than interrupting the flow of the participant's story or an answer to a question, any queries were noted as the person was talking and followed up when they had concluded their answer. Interruption of the participant sometimes resulted in loss of ideas or a 'train of thought'. Sometimes, the participant commenced another subject by way of explanation, resulting in the first subject being left unexplored.

4.5.6 Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference Groups

Two group meetings were held – one in Melbourne on the 24th November, 2009 and one in Brisbane on the 8th December, 2009. Prior to the Melbourne meeting, six participants indicated their intention to participate, however only three came on the day. Of those three, one came late to the meeting and another person left early. Therefore, apart from a short crossover of time (approximately 15 minutes), only two participants were present together. In Brisbane, three participants attended the meeting in person, and three from regional and rural locations teleconferenced into the meeting. All of these participants stayed for the duration of the meeting, with one arriving twenty minutes after the meeting commenced.

The group meetings took, respectively, 1 hour, 59 minutes (Melbourne meeting) and 2 hours, 13 minutes (Brisbane meeting). To enable transcription of the meeting content, a video camera and an audio digital recorder recorded both meetings. Prior permission was gained from each participant about the use of the recording devices. See Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups).

The aim of the two group meetings was to engage in a cooperative knowledge building exercise around a theory of structural community development. Discussion was based on a Findings Paper distributed to participants prior to the meeting. This is discussed in 4.6.2, in this chapter.

4.5.6.1 Meeting Agenda

Participants were given a draft meeting agenda and consent forms prior to the meetings. The meeting agenda was based on the questions posed in the findings paper and the time constraints for each meeting. However, there was an opportunity for participants to propose additional agenda items. This occurred at the start of both groups, to ensure the practitioner-led goals were also being met.

The aims of the meeting processes were four-fold:

- To gain a group agreement about the goals of the meeting, the role of the ‘observer’, and teleconferencing etiquette (for the Brisbane meeting).
- To gain a general understanding about what aspects of the findings paper resonated with attendees and what concepts they felt were missing from the paper that might be thought of as related to a theory of structural community development.
- To gain an understanding about more specific concepts, particularly those that elicited contradictory theorising across the cohort at interview, or concepts that held some kind of tension between concepts. These included discussion on concepts such as ‘disadvantage’, processes of ‘collective transformation’ and ‘class’.
- To distill some normative characteristics (Mikkelsen 2005) of structural community development through the use of a nominal group technique.

As with the individual interviews, attempts were made to elicit knowledge and wisdom from the participants using a funneling technique, moving the conversation from general to more specific topics, and then proceeding to very specific conclusions with the nominal group

technique. Sometimes, questions were asked and answered using a 'round-robin' technique, where every person had an opportunity to respond in turn. However, the aim was also to achieve dialogue between participants. I purposefully used eye contact across the group, seeking responses from any or all participants in relation to a particular participant's comments. At the Brisbane meeting, I constantly checked with the three teleconferencing participants whether they had reflections to make or add. This all contributed to the consensus-building process, where I specifically asked for agreement or disagreement about a particular individual's view.

I was especially careful to ensure the three teleconferencing participants at the Brisbane meeting felt included and were aware of what was happening throughout the meeting. For example, I informed them when one attendee arrived after the meeting had commenced. During the nominal group technique, where participants' ideas were recorded in the public space on blank paper, I talked through my actions so teleconferencing participants knew what was happening.

4.5.6.2 Nominal Group Technique

A nominal group technique was used to elicit opinions about what participants' believed were the critical issues that help or hinder the practice of structural community development. Fontana and Frey (2000:651) describe the technique as a structured and controlled process, where participants rank ideas in terms of importance (Minichiello et al. 2008:160). Its use captures a range of opinions and also gives all participants equal opportunity to provide input.

Attendees were asked to list three concepts that help or hinder structural community development practice. They did this through a process of individual reflection and then, in turn, read out their responses. These were publicly recorded on blank paper. At the Melbourne meeting, where there were two people remaining in attendance at the time of the nominal group technique, six ideas were generated. At the Brisbane meeting, where six attendees were in attendance at the time of the nominal group technique, 18 ideas were generated. Rather than rank responses in order of importance, all ideas were considered of equal importance.

The consensus-building aim of the consensus conference meetings was assisted by the nominal group technique. It allowed participants to hear and see other people's responses and, where ideas were the same, a connecting line was made between them on the paper, creating a visual link. This occurred when the ideas expressed were the same but perhaps different language was used. In these cases, clarification was sought from the contributing participant to see if the concepts meant the same thing, or if they meant different things.

In summary, the consensus conference group meetings contributed to praxis when, together, practitioners explored and theorised ideas about structural community development. They were encouraged to think critically about concepts discussed and, through dialogue with their colleagues, gain consensus about concepts. Where divergent opinions emerged within the group, consensus was reached that the practice is broad enough to value a variety of positions and explanations, and therefore, the divergence was deemed warranted.

4.5.6.3 Use of an Observer

An 'observer' was used at both meetings. The observer had two main roles. One was to ensure the video recorder recorded the meeting and the other was to take notes about the order in which participants spoke. Each participant was ascribed a code, for example, 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2', and so on. An example of what the observer wrote was: "Question 3: A, 1, 4, 2, A". This means that, in relation to question three, Athena (the researcher) spoke first (introducing the question), then participant number one spoke next, followed by participant number four, and so on. This role was needed because it was predicted that, at times, more than one participant was likely to speak at the same time, making it difficult to distinguish the individual voices on the recording devices.

Two different people were recruited to be observers, one for the Melbourne meeting and one for the Brisbane meeting. Recruitment of observers was achieved by contacting the post-graduate research coordinators at universities in Melbourne and Brisbane, requesting that they pass on an invitation to their post-graduate research students asking for a volunteer to help with the research. It was a requirement that the 'observer' was not involved in the community development field, to ensure they would not inadvertently contribute to discussion at the meetings. The research participants at each meeting were informed of the

identity of the observer prior to the meeting, giving them the opportunity to agree to the observer's attendance.

4.5.7 Ethics

Ethical clearance for the study, "An exploration of the relationship between structure and community development practice: towards a theory of structural community development", was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Social Work and Human Services, University of Queensland in February 2009. Clearance Number: SWAHS2009/1/1.

The main ethical issues with both the individual interviews and the consensus conference groups were around recording the interviews and group meetings. This may have had ramifications, particularly in relation to the identification of employers or other people involved in community development processes, especially if participants spoke about these entities or people in a negative way. Participants were given written assurance that all data collected would be de-identified in transcriptions. Providing this assurance of de-identification allowed participants greater freedom to participate in discussion, as they did not have to concern themselves with self-censorship. Without compromising the meanings of concepts found in the data, pseudonyms were used to disguise the data so confidentiality could be assured. In seven cases, participants took up the offer to receive a copy of their de-identified transcript. In one of those cases, amendments were made by that participant to further de-identify content or to remove content.

4.5.8 Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data

The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews from Stage One verbatim. Usually transcription occurred immediately after each interview, except for times when interviews were scheduled in short-timeframes. For example, all of the Victorian interviews took place within a three-week period. Transcription of these interviews took place after I returned to my office.

The transcription period was six months in duration, with over 210,000 words transcribed across the twenty-two interviews. I transcribed the interviews with the view of immersing

myself in the data, and taking advantage of this process to begin recording memos about emerging themes and questions, which could be formulated for the second stage group processes.

The approach to transcription prepared me for a thematic analysis of the data. The process involved completely transcribing verbatim what was said in the interview, including the pauses and utterances, for example, ‘ums’, ‘ahs’, and laughter. Inflections in voice were also noted, for example, notes about emotion (*incredulously*) or (*angrily*). Full transcription in this fashion occurred because the meaning of words as text can be forgotten as time goes by, and this strategy reminded me of a participant’s meaning without having to re-listen to recorded conversations. However, at times during the analysis stage, parts of voice recordings were listened to again to re-check a participant’s meaning if that was unclear from the transcribed text. The analysis of the interviews focused on themes in the respondents’ comments. The manner of how these were presented remained in the background, rather than the focus of the analysis.

The transcripts of the individual interviews ranged from 5,969 words to 12,725 words. The transcript of the Queensland meeting was 13,938 words and the transcript of the Melbourne meeting was 14,507 words.

Both Stage Two meetings were transcribed in full by me and were provided to the participants that attended the particular meetings. This took place within one month of the meetings being held.

4.6 The Analysis Process

Patton (2002) states that research texts typically make the distinction that analysis in research begins after the data collection process has ended. However, Patton also argues,

But the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis far less absolute. In the course of fieldwork, ideas about directions for analysis will occur. Patterns take shape. Possible themes spring to mind (2002:436).

This was the case with this research. The iterative nature of this study involved the formulation of interview questions based on both the original conceptual design, and through the emergence of themes in the content. This led to further investigation about specific areas of community development practice undertaken at Stage Two where, through those processes, additional patterns of themes in the content emerged.

The qualitative analysis process for this study can be described as a form of “analytic induction”, the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to a mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman 2011:206). Analysing data means systematically organising, integrating and examining data, and looking for patterns and relationships among the specific details (Neuman 2011). Analysis also allows the researcher to “improve understanding, expand theory and advance knowledge” (Neuman 2011:507).

Thematic structures and overarching constructs (Patton 2002) emerged during the analysis when examining the transcribed interviews, referred to here as text. “Categorical indexing” (Mason 2002:150) was undertaken, which means applying a uniform set of indexing categories systemically and consistently to the data. This involved reading a small section of the text, such as a paragraph, and allocating a categorical name to it, for example “social justice”. However, Mason (2002) argues that this type of simple indexing has limitations, particularly if the coding produces categories so broad or bland as to be of limited further use. This process can also be problematic if the category is to be used across cases, where comparison or connections are being made with more than one text. These problems occurred during the categorical indexing for this study. For example, in relation to the theme “social justice”, the way in which different participants talked *about* social justice differed, therefore I needed to create other categories or sub-categories of the theme with different names. By doing this, I was assured that I was capturing the variety of ways in which a theme was discussed. Another limitation of index coding is where a section of text relates to more than one theme or concept at a time, thus requiring a more sophisticated way of creating both unrelated and interrelated categories and subcategories (Mason 2002). The level of sophistication of analysis in this study increased as different processes of analysis were employed. These processes are discussed in the next three sub-sections.

4.6.1 Analysis Process of Stage One

To begin analysing the Stage One data a mind-mapping process was undertaken. When transcribing each in-depth interview, conceptual maps were created of the main concepts on large sheets of paper. Salanda (2011:133) refers to this type of visual representation of data as “think display”. The magnitude of text can be essentialised into graphics, “at-a-glance”, with various shapes and lines displaying names of codes, categories and concepts (Salanda 2011:133).

Twenty-four conceptual maps were created, roughly in line with the various interview questions asked. Each conceptual map had concept ‘bubbles’, which outlined the key concepts discussed, as well as a reference to the participant(s) who referred to that concept. See Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map. Being able to see the conceptual maps helped my thinking about the relationships between the concepts and questions asked, and how these might be written about in a findings paper.

The limitation with this approach became evident as the process progressed. With twenty-four conceptual maps, it became somewhat unwieldy to examine these simultaneously. The other limitation was this approach is limited by the finite amount of content I could fit on each map. Hence, some of the questions required more than one conceptual map to adequately visualize all the concepts found within them.

Therefore, although helpful to me in relation to visualizing concepts, mind mapping was only helpful as a broad ‘first treatment’ of data analysis. It was sufficient, however, to enable me to write a findings paper, which was used as a base document for the Stage Two processes. From this experience, I knew I would need to use a more comprehensive tool to allow me to undertake more thorough analysis of data from Stage One and Stage Two. Subsequently, NVivo (Bazeley 2007) was used, a computer software program, enabling me to organise and analyse the data more thoroughly.

4.6.2. The Findings Paper

Appendix 7 reproduces a twenty-three-page findings paper that was written from the conceptual maps. All twenty-two participants agreed to receive the paper. It presented findings based on a synthesis of all twenty-two participants' voices and perspectives. Descriptions and explanations about the subject matter were clustered under various headings.

Throughout the paper, questions for reflection were posed. Participants were invited to individually respond to the paper by telephone or in writing. Alternatively, they were invited to attend a group meeting with other Stage One participants to discuss the questions. The questions for reflection in the paper were designed to elicit opinions about:

- the paper's accuracy;
- whether major points made during the interviews were reflected in the paper;
- whether major points were missing from the paper;
- the diversity of views or contradictions around specific subject matter;
- unexpected omissions from the data (for example, participants mostly told stories of experiences they had observed of individual transformation, not group transformation as a result of participation in community development process. Likewise, there was no mention of the concept of 'class', despite its predominance in the literature);
- how more 'aspirational' aspects of practice might be translated into concrete action; and,
- whether there are normative processes for structural community development, and if so, what are participants' suggestions for engaging in this type of practice.

A challenge related to this stage of the process involves the time lapse between participants' individual interviews and receipt of the findings paper, which occurred on the 10th November 2009. The longest time lapse was with participant number one, who was interviewed on 23rd March 2009. The shortest time lapse was with participant number 22; who was interviewed on 15th September 2009. The time lapse was longer than expected because, as previously mentioned, the length of time to transcribe the individual interviews took several months, and this delayed the writing schedule for the findings paper.

Two participants responded to the paper in writing, providing responses to all the questions posed. Nine other participants participated in the group meetings. Therefore, eleven of the twenty-two participants interviewed were involved in the second stage of the research process.

4.6.3 Subsequent Analysis Process of Stages One and Two

The qualitative data gathered from the Stage One interviews, the Stage Two responses to the findings paper and the two group meetings were analysed with the aid of NVivo. Darlington and Scott (2002:145) state that qualitative analysis of research data is concerned with identifying patterns in the data. In this study, patterns within the data focused on themes in participants' perspectives of professional practices relating to various dimensions of structure. These are known in coding terms as "strategy codes" (Bogdan & Bilken 2007:177).

The context in which practice occurs, known in coding terms as "setting / context codes" (Bogdan & Bilken 2007:174) was also relevant. Various contexts presented different types of data, where practice was shaped by the particularities associated with the specific type of practice. For example, when working as a community development practitioner with people from CALD backgrounds, culturally specific or cross-cultural practices are an important element in practice. This may be very different for a community development practitioner who is working in the micro-finance or social-enterprise field.

When commencing with Nvivo, "cases" were created. Cases refer to the unit of analysis in the research study (Bazeley 2007:42). The cases provided information about the various particularities of each participant, including their gender, educational background, type of work, locality, years of experience, and so on. Subsequently, 410 coding "nodes" were created, based on stories and concepts discussed by participants. Nodes provide the storage areas in NVivo for references to coded text (Bazeley 2007:15). Nodes could be categorized as being about: contextual factors for practice; concepts or practitioner analysis; practice-related subject matter; practitioner-related subject matter; and subject matter relating to practice aims and outcomes. The nodes were clumped into themes and these became "tree nodes". Tree nodes are a structured way to show how ideas connect together, either because

they represent similar kinds of concepts or are related in some practical or theoretical way (Bazeley 2007:99). See Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node.

Both the conceptual framework and the research questions drove the creation of nodes. They were created when analysing data as it relates to particular theoretical concepts. Also, in line with the constructionist nature of study, nodes were created when themes emerged based on a range of responses to interview questions. When all the nodes were created, the research questions were revisited. The question was asked, “Which nodes are involved in answering this research question?” For each research question, the nodes that were considered helpful in answering the question were clustered together. For each question, however, helpful nodes and any missing nodes or exceptions were examined. The intersection of the nodes and cases was also examined, for example, the similarities and differences between demographics; gender; training; current employment; and length of employment.

When a clear theme emerged from the clustering exercise, a “memo” was written. In NVivo, these relate to the keeping of a journal (Bazeley 2007:29), which is a writing process that “often provides sharp, sunlight moments of clarity or insight – little conceptual epiphanies”. For my purposes, writing memos was a way I could organise my thoughts and test out how cogent a theme was in relation to answering a research question. Five memos were written on subjects including: “citizenship”; the “nominal group technique”; “outcomes of group meetings”; “structuring beyond the local” and “what this practice looks like”.

For all of the data analysis chapters, several iterations of analysis occurred. As themes were categorised and findings written, the act of writing often inspired further analysis, and, thus further writing. For example, version two of Chapter Five discussed a theme about ‘structure as a source of oppression’. However, subsequent analysis revealed a more macro concept, ‘power’. This shifted the analysis to a higher level of abstraction (Neuman 2011:64). Often, concepts at a higher level of abstraction remained as themes discussed in the final iteration of the chapter. This process of re-categorisation of themes was evidence of a deeper examination of the data, looking particularly at the relationships between concepts.

Chapter Five and its focus on practitioners’ analysis answers the first research question on how ‘structure’ was conceptualised. Chapter Six and its focus on practitioners’ approaches to practice answers the second research question. Chapter Seven and its focus on frameworks

for practice answers two questions on frameworks of practice and the effectiveness of practice.

Chapter Five is a relatively straightforward description of themes and concepts as they came together around the subject matter of practitioners' thoughts on 'structure'. Chapter Six is written in a storytelling style, where eleven stories are told to illustrate themes about how practice is being carried out. This was a particularly satisfying chapter to write, given the paucity of literature about specific approaches to community development in contemporary Australian practice contexts. Chapter Seven merges elements from both Chapters Five and Six and other data to reveal three key frameworks of practice drawn upon by practitioners. Of the three data analysis chapters, Chapter Seven is written most analytically and critically. It is more analytical in the sense that frameworks are distilled from the accounts of practitioners and presented in a format showing commonalities and differences across the sample. It is more critical in the sense that it focuses on the political and social ramifications of fieldwork (Saldana 2011:157), as was told to me through the accounts of practitioners. All three data analysis chapters quote participants "verbatim" to illustrate, in their voice, salient points and themes.

4.7 Limitations of the Research Design and Methods

Limitations refer to conditions that may impact on findings of a research project and delimitations refer to a study's particular boundaries (O'Leary 2005). Both of these have relevance to this study.

4.7.1 Issues of Trustworthiness

The two main threats to trustworthiness of the qualitative conclusions of this research project are "researcher bias" and "reactivity" (Maxwell 2005:108). Both of these involve the subjectivity of me, the researcher. I was mindful of my own views when selecting data. I ensured that the data selected was across the range of views, including my own.

To reduce the possibility of researcher bias and to ensure a more rigorous process, my advisors provided peer checking with one of the interviews. Early in the interview schedule,

they read raw data to check on both the interview processes, and to ensure I followed up areas of investigation evenly. They independently coded the data for that transcript, so we could compare these with my coding, to check for reliability. “Coding is the most difficult operation for inexperienced researchers to understand and master” states Strauss (1987) cited in Neuman (2011:511), therefore, this peer review process played an important role in my development as a beginning researcher.

I was aware that the concepts inherent within this study could have been somewhat challenging to practitioners, especially if they felt that their practice was not matching up to the emancipatory potential of community development to which the literature so often alludes. Indeed, this very fact, that the realities often *do not* match the rhetoric, was one of the drivers for me to undertake this research. Therefore, in relation to “reactivity” (Maxwell 2005:108-109), it was my intention that this study would more accurately describe both the challenges *to* and spaces *for* resistance, and the emancipatory or transformatory potential of community development.

4.7.2 Other Limitations, Delimitation and Difficulties

Limitations relating to the use of mind mapping as a conceptual tool have already been discussed. There is another limitation around sampling. Although I sought as diverse a sample as possible to elicit a range of opinions, I was unable to cover all relevant areas of difference. The focus on recruitment from only two Australian states might also be considered a delimitation (O’Leary 2005). Other styles of community development are likely to be taught and practiced in other Australian states. Furthermore, this research process interviewed practitioners only, not community members who are often involved in community development processes. Therefore, I have generated a view of community development from the practitioner perspective only.

The limitation of sampling also applies to the consensus conference processes which, Sniderman (1999) argues, requires a diversity of membership to be effective. It would be fair to say that the Brisbane meeting generated more varied data. I attribute this to the diverse backgrounds of these practitioners, but also to the nature of the consensus conference group process, which worked more successfully with a larger number of attendees. A great degree

of consensus was reached in the Victorian meeting because there were only a small number of people contributing ideas, however, it was more difficult to elicit a breadth of opinion in this setting.

Furthermore, an aim of the consensus conference group process was to generate praxis. I now believe this technique is limited without the participation of greater numbers of people. Also, the fact that the meeting only occurred once demonstrated to me that praxis could only have been achieved through more *continuing* processes; assuming praxis is *ever* truly attainable. Certainly, feedback from the Brisbane participants after the meeting (when I sent them the meeting transcript) indicated that the meeting was very helpful to their analysis as individuals. They all heartily responded to my somewhat optimistic wish to find opportunities to keep this type of dialogue going, as all who attended appreciated the collective nature of the analysis process.

4.8 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has justified and described the methodology undertaken in this study. The chapter has explored the epistemological approach, that is, social constructionism with a critical theory lens, and categorised the type of study as practitioner research. In an effort to be transparent and unambiguous, the processes of data gathering, data processing and data analysis have been thoroughly discussed. The limitations and restrictions inherent within the methods have also been discussed, demonstrating an understanding that certain limits exist within all social research, including those relevant to this study. The findings of qualitative research cannot, strictly speaking, be generalised. However, by setting out the methodological processes clearly and systematically, the study could be replicated in other contexts. Processes such as the ones used in this study could be used to generate other types of practice theory. The rigour employed throughout the various processes confirms a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity, and therefore, credibility (Patton 2002) in terms of the results. The following three chapters report these results. Each chapter provides discussion on the themes that emerged from the extensive analysis and, in their entirety, are relevant to the theory-building exercise on Structural Community Development discussed in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring Practitioner's Analysis on Structure and Community Development

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three reporting the results of this study. It addresses the first research question: “How do practitioners think about structure in their work”? It examines the kinds of *analysis* practitioners apply when approaching their work. They analyse the circumstances of their constituents, as well as the state of affairs within society more generally, particularly those that have a bearing on how practitioners’ constituents experience their lives. Practitioners apply various lenses or frameworks to analyse what is happening in a given context and this analysis informs the decisions they make about how to proceed with their community development work within those contexts.

The next section provides an overview of the way themes were addressed when practitioners discussed the idea of ‘structure’. Six observations can be made about how structure was discussed. This section qualifies the data into parts of speech, for example, nouns, verbs and adjectives. This approach was used as an analytical tool when first examining the data based on Burkett’s (2001) theorising, which discusses modernist and postmodernist interpretations of specific concepts. Further, the related concept, “grammatical variance” (Burkett & Kelly 2008), is introduced to highlight processes that have the potential to increase a person’s sense of agency and is an important concept, particularly when one is thinking about “structure”. Four sections that discuss, in more detail, practitioners’ analysis, follow this. The themes distilled include, “Structures in Society” (Section Three); “Power” (Section Four); “Agency” (Section Five); and the idea of “Structuring Community Development Work” (Section Six). Conceptual or mind maps are used in each of the sections, providing a visual representation of concepts at-a-glance (Salanda 2011).

Implications arising from these discussions include: 1. Taking a postmodernist interpretation of structure can impact on practitioners’ sense of agency; 2. Structure can be viewed as a system that has both barriers, but also intangible qualities that enable practice; 3. The

centrality of an analysis of power and the structural implications this has on people's lives and on practice seems essential; 4. Structure can be viewed in terms of agency, processes that enable creativity in structure-making and in generating choices; 5. Structuring work involves a range of skills and processes to sustain work over time, and makes micro-macro connections to effect change.

At interview, participants were encouraged to explore their understanding of 'structure' in community development. They did this by responding to the interview question, "If I was to say words such as 'structure', 'structuring', 'structural', 'structured', what comes to mind about your community development practice?" There was a vast difference in word length when practitioners answered this interview question. The shortest response was 46 words and the longest was 1926 words, with 326 words being the median length. Responses to the question up to 400 words largely were definitional in nature, that is, practitioners chose one of the prompt words and defined it. Those using between 620 – 1926 words included both a definition of the prompt word and one or more examples of how this understanding is applied in practice.

Participants also discussed structure as a concept in the remainder of their interviews and at the Stage Two group meetings. While participants' responses to the question on structure were a starting point in answering this research question, data from both stages is included in this analysis.

Throughout this and the subsequent findings chapters, direct quotations are used to illustrate points being made. The quotations are coded in three ways representing the different ways data was collected. For example:

1. At the individual interviews, "Q1" means Queensland participant, number one.
2. At the group meetings, "VM4" means Victorian participant, number four who attended the Victorian meeting.
3. Written responses to the findings, "Q1, Stage Two" means Queensland participant, number one who corresponded.

5.2 The idea of “Structure”

This section reports six general observations that can be made about the way participants discussed the concept of structure and community development, including:

1. Their use of all the prompt words;
2. The way they either repeated the prompts, or used synonyms for them;
3. The number of prompt words used;
4. The way in which the prompt words were discussed as concepts that can be categorized as nouns, verbs or adjectives;
5. The way the participants changed these categories over the course of the interview; and
6. How the concept of structure evoked discussions about power.

The *first observation* is that all four prompts words were discussed across all the interviews, but no one participant discussed all four prompts. “Structure” was discussed as structures in society, or new types of structures created through community development. “Structuring” and “structured” were discussed as ways of organising community development work. For example, practitioners discussed structuring processes or working in a structured or unstructured way. The word “structural” was used as either structural change or structural analysis.

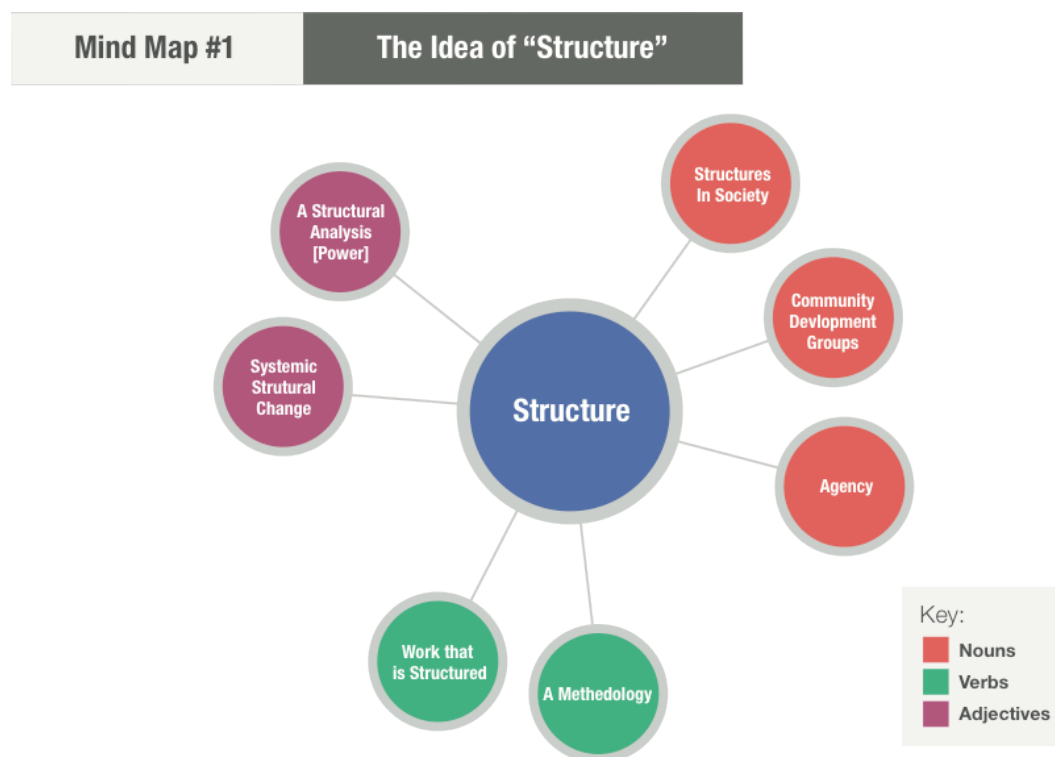
The *second observation* is that, across the group, 18 out of 22 practitioners repeated one or more of the words and went on to discuss their application to practice. However, in four cases, none of the prompt words were used but others were utilised as synonyms for the prompt words. In two of these cases, the word “system” (V5, V12) was used to discuss the structures in society. In another case, the word “strategy” (V8) was used, because the work of V8 involves strategic thinking and action. In the final case, the non-word “structuralisation” (V6) was used as a simile for an employing organisation that V6 perceived to be overly bureaucratic.

The *third observation* is that, 12 of the 22 practitioners chose *one* of the prompt words and answered the question directly in relation to that chosen word. In these instances, their practice was represented by a single image or metaphor for practice. The remaining ten

practitioners chose *two* of the prompt words to formulate their answer to the question. They discussed these in turn, using more than one image or metaphor to describe practice.

The remaining observations qualify the data by using parts of speech, that is, nouns, verbs and adjectives. This resonates with Burkett's (2001) ideas about modernist and postmodernist concepts being seen in terms of nouns and verbs. Burkett does not talk about adjectives, and conceptualizing them this way may also be helpful when thinking about community development. See diagram below, (Figure 2), which is a visual representation of the data.

Figure 2: Mind Map #1, The Idea of Structure



The diagram shows how concepts can be seen as nouns, verbs or adjectives. This diagram is reproduced in other sections of this chapter, where various elements of the diagram are focused on, in turn. The nouns include the concepts: *Structure in Society*; *Community Development Groups* and *Agency*. The verbs include the concepts: *Work that is Structured* and *A Methodology*. The Adjectives included the concepts: *A Structural Analysis* and

Systemic Structural Change. The remaining discussion in this chapter provides detailed descriptions of these concepts.

The *fourth observation* is that for 20 of the 22 responses, practice was discussed as either a *noun* or a *verb*. In 15 instances, nouns were utilised; these included various tangible objects, such as structures in society or the political, financial and social service systems that are the context for practice. In 12 of these 15 cases, the structures or systems discussed were perceived as oppressive or causing disadvantage for the practitioners' constituents. Other tangible objects included the various vehicles through which community development is carried out. For example, a group, often formed by community members, can be a vehicle to carry forward particular agendas of its members. These groups take on particular characteristics based on the processes and analysis of the group members.

Another noun, *agency*, was used explicitly by one practitioner who had studied the concept of structure and agency in other research. Apart from this practitioner, all others used the term more implicitly. There is a qualitative difference between the noun 'agency' and the other nouns discussed above. Therefore, on this occasion, agency could be viewed more like a verb, as it is about acting.

In 13 instances, *verbs* were utilised as various ways practice is organised by practitioners. Ten practitioners talked about structure this way. V8 and V10 spoke about ways they have organised or structured their work, one in which they plan for and strategise action. V7 also emphasised ways they structure to increase accountability and how the field of community development could raise its esteem alongside other fields of practice. Four others, Q4, Q6, V9 and V11, discussed how they structured processes situationally. They intentionally use unstructured approaches to remain responsive to community issues as they arise. The final three practitioners, Q3, Q5 and Q9, discussed structural practice as a specific methodological approach they use to initiate community development processes, form groups and sustain groups over time.

With the remaining two cases, practice was discussed as either a verb or noun *and* as an *adjective*. As an adjective, Q5 referred to having a "structural analysis", that is, Q5's perception about an analysis of structures in society causing oppression, as opposed to individuals blaming themselves for difficult circumstances in which they might find

themselves. V4 referred to “structural change”, that is, V4’s perception that community development aims to bring about “systemic structural change” (V4). This understanding is that some structures in society impact negatively on people and others do not, and therefore, practice is an exercise in “how we can manage to make structures work well for people” (V4).

These adjectives are used in two different ways. V4 has a perception that community development is a way to achieve a goal, this is, structural change. The change being referred to is one that creates a more egalitarian society, where particular groups, by virtue of particular characteristics, are not any more disadvantaged than other groups in society. However, when Q5 uses the adjective “structural analysis”, the perception is that community development is exercised as analysing power.

The *fifth observation* is that the 12 practitioners who discussed structure as a noun or as a verb *only* did not necessarily continue to hold that singular interpretation throughout the whole interview. Indeed, the very next question at interview saw five out of the seven who spoke of structure as tangible objects only (nouns) subsequently giving examples of structure as change-oriented processes in which they have been involved (verbs). Their examples discussed ways of structuring or organising their work to bring about some sort of desirable change.

This change of interpretation from nouns to verbs took place when participants answered the interview question: “Do you view your thinking about structural aspects of practice as somewhat *aspirational*, meaning you hope for it, but you know that it’s not very achievable in the day-to-day realities of your work?” In hindsight, this was a somewhat clumsily worded question, but nevertheless, one that every participant answered forthrightly. For those who changed their response from utilising nouns to utilising verbs over the two questions, I interpret their responses to mean that they have a view of structure that goes beyond a functionalist standpoint (Giddens 2009). Rather than imagining fixed objects exercising a function in society, they see structures as objects that may be acted upon. Viewing structures in society as verbs means community development employs mechanisms for acting, relating and behaving purposefully to achieve particular goals. It also suggests pliability and variability, possibly favourable characteristics when considering practitioners’

analysis about structures being oppressive, resulting in disadvantage for some groups within society. These structures may have the potential for change.

The two practitioners who spoke about structures in society as tangible objects and *did not* alter this stance when asked the subsequent interview question were particularly emphasising how their organisational context creates barriers for themselves and their constituents. They *agreed* with the subsequent question about structural aspects of practice being somewhat aspirational, and perhaps not achievable. Their perception was that their organisational context causes too many barriers for positive outcomes to be achieved.

For the remaining five practitioners who originally utilised verbs, when answering the subsequent “aspirational” question, they remained with their initial interpretation of the prompt words. They went on to answer this question by providing further examples of structuring or organising processes as a day-to-day reality in their work.

Using nouns and verbs as a framework to analyse practitioner’s responses to the interview question becomes significant from the standpoint of examining community development from modernist and postmodernist viewpoints. Burkett (2001) argued that community development practice traditions have relied predominantly on modernist reference points when viewing ‘community’ and ‘community practice’. These are based around notions of fixity, objectivity and universalism, with fixed characteristics and spaces, objective structures and universalised ideals (Burkett 2001). However, postmodern interpretations of community development emphasise creative possibilities for working in the contested contexts of practice brought about by globalization (Burkett, 2001) and the competing discourses inherent within these contexts (Kenny, 2002). Burkett (2001) argued that viewing community and community practice as a verb, not a noun, brings “meaning”, “context” and “relationality” to the forefront of analysis. This is a more dynamic approach to engaging with human complexity. This approach is “processual” and represents new kinds of communities relevant for the 21st Century (Burkett 2001).

Qualifying data into parts of speech has a deeper significance, and relates to a particular dialogical tool used by practitioners when communicating with others. Burkett and Kelly (2008) argue that, in dialogue, grammatical variance plays an important function as it can help loosen the fixedness of meaning of key words by deliberately unveiling the multiple

meanings that are associated with them. Nouns tend to name objects and situations and give the impression of fixedness, whereas verbs or action-oriented words focus on action and describe what is to be done (Burkett & Kelly 2008). If, in one's speech, nouns are being used to totalize or dominate in ways that cause one to become overwhelmed or paralyzed by a situation, then the skillful use of grammatical variance in dialogue can have a liberating effect. This occurs, for example, if a situation is seen in new ways, such as an array of human energy or diversity that may present a new picture (Burkett & Kelly 2008). In terms of the narratives of the majority of participants in this study, the heuristic 'structure' was viewed in terms of 'structure-making'. It was also viewed in terms of the myriad of relationships practitioners hold with people within an organisational structure or bureaucracy. One could argue that both of these uses of structure demonstrates participants have gained agency. They do not view a structure as a fixed, one-dimensional, immovable entity, but they view structure in term of process, where the possibilities to build relationships, develop actions and effect change are endless.

The observations discussed so far reveal that, regardless of whether practitioners responded with a single image or multiple images of practice, they all demonstrated an analysis of structure as: tangible objects; people having agency; ways practice is organised; the importance of having a structural analysis; that community development is about structural change; or various combinations of these. It was not surprising to see such an emphasis being placed on action-oriented thinking, given that community development practice is primarily about activating and mobilising communities. However, the observed shift, from views about structures in societies as tangible objects that are often oppressive to views about pliable structures that can be acted upon, was significant. It suggests that most practitioners do not have an uncritical acceptance of societal structures' role in oppression. Rather, they have an analysis about the proactive role community development can have in acting upon societal structures to create a more egalitarian or just society.

Finally, the *sixth observation* is that 20 of the 22 practitioners revealed an explicit analysis about structure *and power*. These included perceptions of power in five ways and are discussed, in detail, further on:

1. Power and structures in society;
2. Analysing power;

3. Influencing powerful structures;
4. Empowerment; and
5. A structural analysis.

The two practitioners who did not discuss power explicitly in response to the first interview question discussed the concept at other times throughout the interview. In both cases, they discussed their perceptions of how community development processes can be empowering for people who engage in them. Therefore, all 22 practitioners, either explicitly or implicitly, perceived power or an analysis of power and its effects, as integral to the concepts of structure and community development.

In summary, this section has presented findings as a result of an initial examination of the data. Six observations were discussed about the ways in which practitioners think about the concept 'structure'. An analytical tool, in which concepts were qualified as parts of speech, was employed, showing that practitioners take a postmodernist interpretation of structure. They view structure not in fixed, static or one-dimensional terms, but in processual terms that have the capacity to increase their sense of agency. Interpretations of practitioners' responses also revealed four key categories, each of which are discussed in more detail in sections in the remainder of this chapter. They include:

1. Structures in society (5.3);
2. Power (5.4);
3. Agency (5.5);
4. Structuring community development work (5.6).

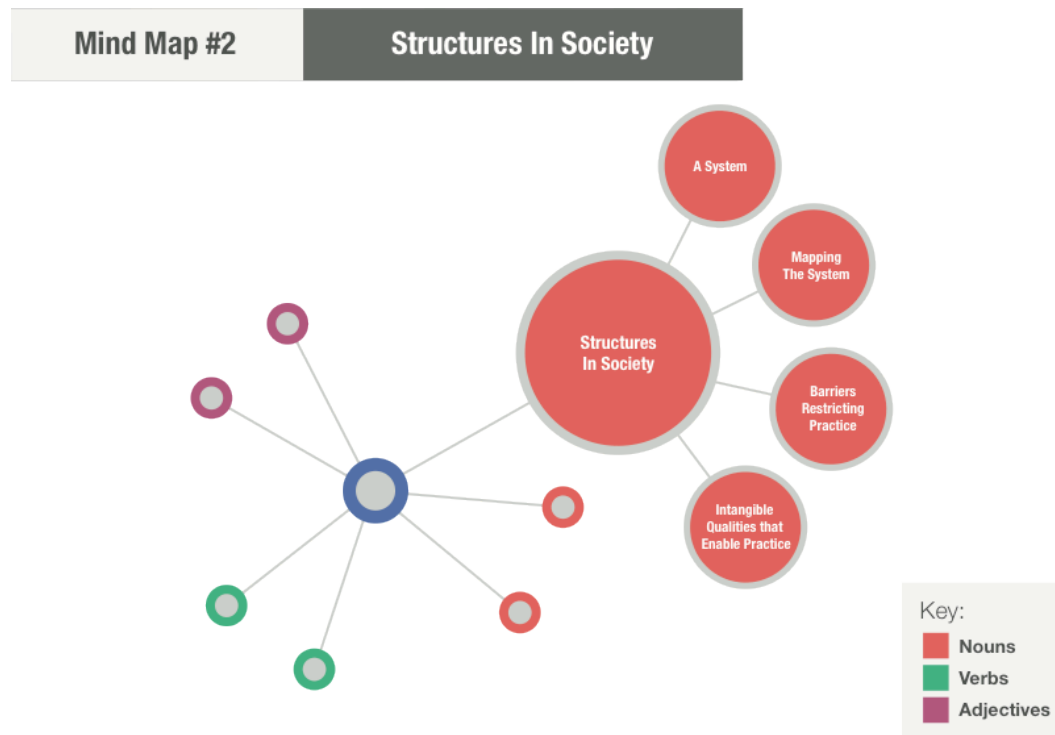
These sections have been ordered this way, based on consensus reached at Stage Two about a sequential process that takes place. This begins with a practitioner's structural analysis about power and extends to ways in which the work is undertaken.

5.3 Structures in Society

This section discusses structures in society, the first category created to discuss the concept of structure. See diagram below, (Figure 3), which is the same diagram introduced in 5.2,

however, it is focusing on the five themes that emerged from the data and categorised as relating to the noun ‘structures in society’.

Figure 3: Mind Map #2, Structures in Society



The following themes emerged from the data and are the perceived qualities of structures and their contexts that relate to community development practice. They include:

1. A system of organisational structures;
2. Mapping the system;
3. Organisational barriers that restrict practice;
4. Intangible organisational qualities that enable practice; and
5. Community development groups.

5.3.1. A System of Organisational Structures

In the following example, a rural practice context, Q4 has an analysis of structures in society as a system of organisational structures. The quote suggests a perception that this system is

complex and aspects of the system impact negatively on Indigenous Australians, who are the community members with whom Q4 works.

So the thought around all those words is ‘organisations’...community organisations, or other organisations, or entities or whatever...the Indigenous sphere is littered with organisations...It affects their framework (of practice) dramatically...a few people, actually the real grass-roots people, understand you can work outside of those organisations; but a lot of people think about ‘if you want to make any improvements, you’ve got to be working through an organisation, you’ve got to get funding and blah blah’. So the idea of structuring or structures around community work is... they’re like these skyscrapers, casting a shadow over the field (Q4).

Q4 clarified why working through formal organisations to make improvements in their communities is problematic for the people with whom he works. Q4 commented:

Well, they usually have these corporations, under the Aboriginal Corporations Act, sometimes they’re Associations, but anyway, they are all formalised, and they come from the Western legal system, and usually they’ve got a set of rules that people don’t understand, they weren’t involved in establishing them, and they don’t own them (Q4).

Q4’s example suggests a perception of formal organisations negatively affecting community members. The comment that only a minority of community members believe it is possible to work outside of established organisations is significant. It suggests a perception that community development may be more effective if it takes place outside of established organisations, as opposed to working within formal organisations.

Q4 perceives that creating and working through formalised organisations are the dominant ways known to mobilise and pursue particular goals. Only legal entities can apply for external funding so, to resource projects, community groups often legally formalise in the hope of attaining the necessary resources needed to carry out their purpose. Q4 also perceives that the governance arrangements associated with formal organisations are an impost that can cause confusion and lack of ownership for members of organisations.

Others also referred to complexity within the system of organisations. A strategy to “map” this system was discussed as way to manage the complexity and, also as a way to be achieve more effective outcomes from practice.

5.3.1.1 Mapping the System

Mapping the system of organisational structures is a way that practitioners make sense of the complex context in which their development work is practiced. The following two examples support this analysis. In this first example, V8 reveals a localised view of the mapping process. V8 works in an urban context, predominately with community members from culturally diverse backgrounds.

(We map) the strategy we are using...the accessibility to our target group. And who is the line, for example, for a community development worker, who is in *my* line, which organisation is on that level? So you have to know who is working in that level, and who is funding or resourcing your role or whatever that structure, and where do those resources come from...you have to have a strategy, you have to have a plan. From? To where? And what is the first step? Whom you talk to? What is the previous experience? And you just build on what already has been done. So that's the strategy (V8, original emphasis).

V8 spends time mapping out the structures and systems that form the context of work. An interpretation of V8's use of the term “my line” is about who is in V8's sphere of influence. V8 wants to influence processes primarily to gain access to a specific target group, people from culturally diverse backgrounds that could benefit from the family support V8's employing organisation offers. V8 also wants to work with other mainstream organisations whose services could be of benefit to the target group, but who may not be operating in culturally accessible ways, and therefore not realising their potential in relation to the target group.

Also working in an urban context, V5 also maps systems but, in the following example, V5 places emphasis on working at a social policy level, as opposed to a local level.

What comes to my mind is planning and policy. Looking at things from a very birds-eye view and seeing where things could be planned differently so that we can address disadvantage and address equity in a much better fashion. And so I see it very much from within ‘the system’ kind of view. So taking a panoramic view and saying ‘this is the lay of the land, can things be done better through policies and planning? (V5).

These two examples suggest an analysis in which it is essential to have knowledge about the systems and their associated processes. How these systems and processes impact on community members’ lives, and how they can be influenced or changed to ameliorate circumstances that cause disadvantage is at the forefront of practitioners’ thinking. Their analysis creates a base from which they make judgments about how to achieve the most effective results they can, and implement appropriate strategies accordingly.

This discussion suggests practitioners’ views about ways in which they work within the current system to benefit community members. The next sub-section discusses practitioners’ views about the organisations for whom they work, and the barriers to practice these organisations generate.

5.3.2 Organisational Barriers that Restrict Practice

When answering the prompt question on structure, three practitioners spoke about their employing organisations. In each case, they emphasised various challenges or barriers they face themselves (V2, V3 & V6), or their constituents’ face (V6), because of specific conditions generated within their employing organisation. V6 commented on the level of bureaucracy that she and her constituents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face when interacting with the organisation.

My current practice? Terrible. Forms, forms, forms, fill in a form to buy a pen....and that’s why it’s so hard sometimes for the community members to actually respond to that structuralisation, because if they ring for help, even if they get through, even if they understand what they need to do, for example, to book a hall, or a footy oval, there will be a form they need to fill in. The form is even confusing for me to fill out, let alone someone who is not speaking English well. So that’s one part of it. But also

jargon, exclusive kind of language, that's ok for you and me to negotiate, because we can imagine what that means, but for people who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, again it's a barrier (V6).

V6 is emphasising barriers for both her work as a practitioner and for the participants of community development activities when they interact with the organisation. Bureaucratic procedures confuse community members and prevent their ability to engage in community development processes that may improve situations for themselves or their communities.

Organisational conditions that are perceived as restricting practice are problematic because this can directly affect practitioner's motivation levels. Such barriers make it harder for practitioners to persist with what can be complex processes, or working with community members on issues of concern over extended periods of time. The three practitioners who raised these matters at interview all left their positions within months of participating in this study, taking up employment in areas of work outside the community development field.

However, organisational barriers that restrict practice do not have to be a de-motivating experience. The next section discusses one practitioner's view that barriers can also be opportunities for practice.

5.3.3 Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice

To this point, the structures in society have been imagined as tangible objects and often discussed as oppressive entities that cause disadvantage or barriers to people's participation in community development activities. However, one practitioner, V12, answered the initial interview question from a somewhat different perspective. Working in a rural context, V12's perception is that, although the context for practice can cause barriers for community members, it does not have to be an impediment to achieving goals.

I think of other words like "system", and I guess I'm quite visual, so I see the mechanics of things. Which could be small systems or small processes that happen, like even in a geographic area, or just on a micro-level wherever that might be. But also, other systems, which could be policies that are in place, or behaviour trends or

cultural values of where we live, or a local group, or an organisation. I guess I think of all the things that actually *seem* invisible that you come across. Where you hit a barrier, it's like an invisible wall, (and) you realise they're there sometimes because you don't expect them to be there. And then you hit up against them and you go 'oh, that's right, that's a boundary which I didn't know about', or 'I knew about it but I keep forgetting cause it's not obvious'. And some boundaries are stated in words, and you just learn 'ok, that's the boundary of that'. But I think there's a lot of boundaries that are there through innuendo or inference, which is where we have some flexibility as CD workers to go 'well, that isn't actually a policy' (V12, original emphasis).

V12 perceives "behaviour trends or cultural values" as intangible characteristics within organisations and communities. This suggests that these intangible characteristics create a type of fluidity with a system (Goodwin & Jasper 2004). For example, what is a behaviour trend now may not be in the future, as specific behaviours and culture vary over time. V12's emphasis on boundaries or barriers that exist "though innuendo or inference" relate to intangible characteristics which allow for flexibility and opportunities for practitioners to influence structures to benefit community members.

V12 was asked to provide an example to illustrate this analysis. V12 told a story of a social policy that assists migrants and refugees by providing English classes and childcare so they may more fully participate in Australian society. The English classes are delivered by one organisational entity and another delivers childcare services, supposedly to create access to the English classes. However, the associated organisational policies clash, resulting in significant barriers for the refugees with whom V12 works.

Later, during the telling of this story, V12 discussed other intangible elements within this system, various "loopholes" V12 looks for to create conditions where community members can take advantage of this social policy.

But there's sort of these loop holes, in such a small thing as getting someone to have their kids; and where that (childcare) centre can be; it's allowed to be a certain amount of time from someone's home; so things like that. It's almost like the policy is probably quite innocent, but either they (the policy makers) are aware or not aware of all the boundaries they've put there (V12).

This example illustrates V12's perception that, regardless of the social policy framer's intention to be helpful to migrants and refugees, there are unintended consequences making the policy ineffective. In this instance, the practical implementation of the social policy by two organisations delivering different aspects of the program is problematic. Both organisations have internal policies that make the overall aims of the social policy difficult to attain. As a community development practitioner with this structural analysis, V12 is looking to act upon the system and change it where possible.

To this point, structures in society have predominately been discussed as organisational structures. The final way practitioners discussed structures in society was as community development groups.

5.3.4. Community Development Groups

All participants discussed structure in terms of community development groups. They discussed groups in more instrumental terms, that is, ways of gathering people together around specific matters. The following example illustrates some of V2's work in an urban context, a population with a high cultural diversity. Forming groups and networks is a key feature of V2's practice.

I think if you bring people together and you talk for long enough, you always seem to come up with all these wonderful ideas. I do like groups. So often I'll email someone about one meeting and they'll say, 'which one's this?' Like, women who are on the Community Development Network, they're on the Vietnamese Advisory Group and they're also in the Women's Group (V2).

Participants also discussed groups in more analytical terms, that is, placing emphasis on the reasons why groups with which they work exist. The following example outlines the wide range of functions Q3 perceives community development groups have in society.

I think about creating new structures that can drive the agendas of people who have been excluded by existing structures. I think about legitimacy in the community,

moving from ‘a group of people who have cups of tea, speaking about an issue’ to ‘a group of people who have a mandate that works through a process that’s an acceptable political process’. It’s about mandate-building, developing mandates for moving on, for actioning ideas (Q3).

Q3 perceives community development groups as vehicles to drive particular agendas, specifically as a remedy for exclusion, a recurring theme throughout the interviews. In this example, Q3 suggests that community development groups can act upon the structures in society that oppress, through an “acceptable political process”, one that takes place when they mobilise around issues of common concern.

In summary, practitioners view structure as structures in society that fit within a system. Structure was also viewed in terms of barriers to practice and intangible factors that can be used to enhance practice. Some of the discussion so far has highlighted an analysis that emphasises *practitioners’* ability to understand the system, how it works and any advantages or disadvantages this might have for community members. Q3’s focus is on *community members* having this analysis of the system and their ability to act upon it collectively. The significance of having these types of analyses is discussed further in the next section on power.

5.4 Power

This section discusses power, the second category created to discuss the concept of structure.

Six Queensland practitioners explicitly talked about power from the perspective of structures or systems that hold power and how associated outcomes disadvantage community members. A common feature of these six practitioners as a group is their training in community development at the same tertiary institution. Despite their lengthy years of practice, the median being 28 years, and what must have been a myriad of influences on their practice over that time period, all have retained the importance of power and having a power analysis.

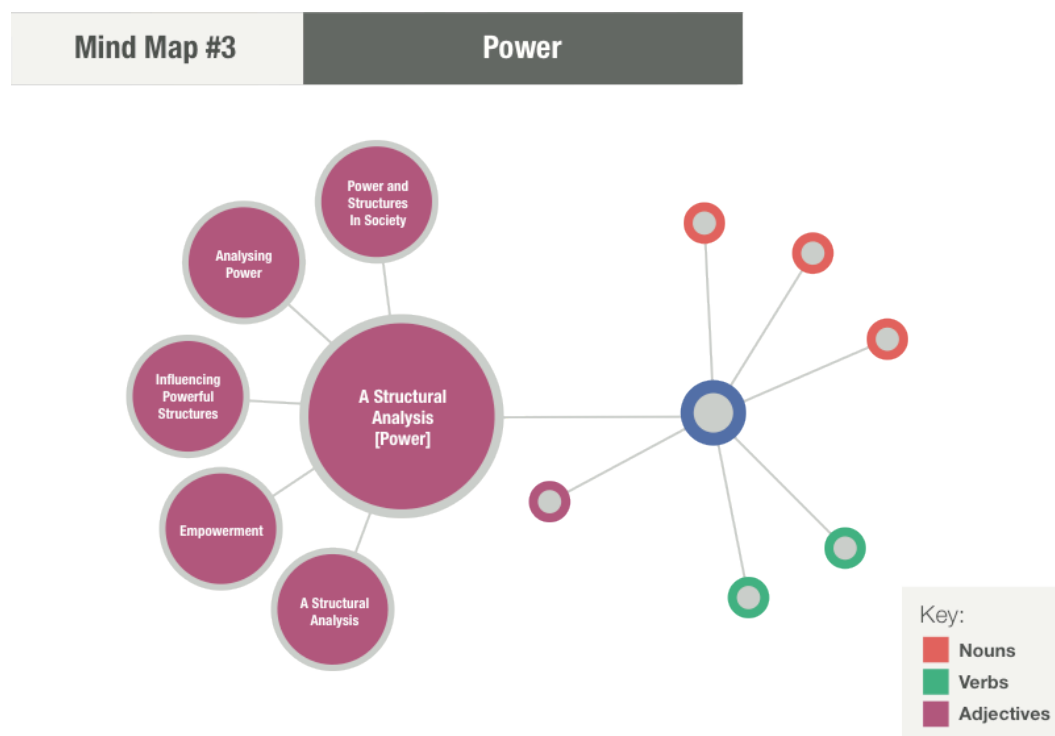
Furthermore, at the Queensland consensus conference meeting, two other Queensland practitioners, also recipients of the same training, joined with four people from this group of

six discussed above. At the meeting, they developed a shared analysis about the significance of practitioners having a structural analysis as *central or integral* to practice. What constitutes a structural analysis is discussed in the last part of this section.

Of the 14 others who had a more implicit understanding of power, four were Queenslanders and ten Victorians. These responses included ideas about structures in society, societal hegemony (Gramsci 1971), the power that practitioners themselves exercise and the concept of empowerment.

The remainder of this section discusses a range of key ways practitioners perceived the concept of power as it relates to community development. See diagram below, (Figure 4), which is the same diagram introduced in 5.2, however, it is focusing on the five themes that emerged from the data and is categorised as relating to the adjective, ‘a structural analysis’.

Figure 4: Mind Map #3, Power



The following themes emerged from the data and are practitioners' perceptions of power and community development. They include:

1. Power and structures in society;
2. Analysing power;
3. Influencing powerful structures;
4. Empowerment; and
5. A structural analysis.

5.4.1 Power and Structures in Society

Fourteen practitioners perceived structures as a cause of oppression in society, impacting negatively on some groups of people. The following example illustrates this perception:

Depending on whatever the power that structure has, or the systems that structure has, will then determine for each person if they can actually navigate that structure....a system, the way it is set up, can replicate disadvantage, so that certain people, because of that structure, definitely will be more disadvantaged, or have more difficulty trying to get any benefits, than other people (Q1).

When asked, Q1, who works with migrants and refugees in a regional area, provided a specific example related to this perception of structures, which have a negative impact:

It depends on the area that the policy or structure is in. For example, all the immigration policy...different kinds of visas.... it's just so complex...it's such a crazy system and I think that's quite frustrating. Something like that has made me really think about discrimination....I feel like a system like that is absolutely, fundamentally flawed (Q1).

The stories Q1 told at interview were of migrants and refugees who daily face many barriers to employment, education and participation in civil society (Cox 1995; Kenny 2011) because of bureaucratic structures and their associated laws and social policies.

Another practitioner's perception of power and structures in society comes from a somewhat different perspective. Q10 perceives *all* structures, including community development groups, as possible sites in which oppression can occur.

However, every structure is a place of contest. While we may be trying to develop structures that create the space to maximise people's power over their own decision-making processes, and we may try to cooperate with other groups and organisations that are developing similar structures, we live in a global political economy that co-opts all structures and uses them for their own vested interests. They may use the language of co-operation but they actually co-opt. And they use this specifically to oppress and exploit and manipulate (Q10).

Q10's perception about the potential of any groups to be inadvertently oppressive suggests it is important for groups to have the ability to analyse a range of power dynamics. They need to analyse power dynamics, both those within their own group and those emanating from structures within social systems which impact on them.

This section discussed practitioners' perception that all structures in society have the potential to oppress. Therefore, the ability of practitioners and community members to analyse power becomes significant. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

5.4.2 Analysing Power

Having the ability to analyse power, which may include who holds power and how that power is exercised, was perceived as an important component of community development. From the data, analysing power was seen in terms of practitioner analysis and community-member analysis. The following example comes from the perspective of *practitioners* having the ability to make these analyses.

I go to a bit of a power model fairly quickly, of who makes the decisions, what sort of powers they have, how you can influence that process for a fair deal for all. And stand with people who are the least able to participate or the most vulnerable and work with them, and work with the structures that exist. So, it's usually different

levels of government, but it might not be. It may be a doctor in a medical centre who is very controlling about their practice and what they will do and won't do with their patients. It may be the hospital system, it may be Centrelink², different Government departments who have power over people's lives (Q7).

In contrast to this perspective above, Q5's perception is that it is important for *community members* to have an analysis of power themselves, particularly if they are disadvantaged in some way and believe their situation is because of some failure at a personal level.

Often marginalised people...will blame themselves and/or others for their situation, not the structures that are actually impacting upon their lives. So helping to build that analysis so people understand that when they're homeless, that isn't always *only* their fault. That there is a range of systems put in place within a public space that has failed them in some way. And building their understanding of that failure of those systems and the opportunities to highlight those failures and to bring about some change is really part of the work, part of community work as I see it (Q5, original emphasis).

These examples show two processes of analysis. The first is a practitioner's analysis of power and the second, as in Q5's example, represents community members' analysis of power, which Q5 believes results from processes facilitated by practitioners. This latter perspective can be interpreted as a consciousness-raising process, or "conscientisation". The term *conscientisation* refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive element of these realities (Freire 1970). Processes that raise the consciousness of a group regarding arbitrarily applied policies that overshadow their particular circumstances can be empowering for group members, especially when they make decisions to act against such oppression. This relates to the concept of 'false consciousness'. In Marxist and Freudian theory "false consciousness" is the process by which our seemingly in-control psyches might be subtly manipulated, to the point where our most private thoughts are dictated by structural processes (Mendleson 2010:300).

² Centrelink is the federal government's organisation for delivering social security payments and services to Australians.

These ideas about community development enabling people's raised consciousness about structural processes were reflected in the data. For example, V10 highlighted how neighbourhood centres can be sites for such conversations.

There is the ideology of the ruling class, in any epoke. Marx said, and Gramsci talked about it as well, "how does that actually happen? What are the mechanisms? So it's things like the media, and politics and the church. And all those things that give us the same messages that just reinforce the status quo. I love that part of the work...having a cup of coffee and listening to conversations and introducing other perspectives into the conversations (V10).

Deneulin and McGregor (2009), when discussing 'wellbeing', provide a salient warning about false consciousness. They argue this is dangerous territory: when processes become paternalistic, and where 'superior' values and meanings, which arise from a higher authority or from a position of more enlightened understanding, discount or devalue the meanings and understandings that form the basis for poor people's decisions and actions (Deneulin & McGregor 2009). Drawing from Manfred Max-Neef's (1991) work on Human Scale Development, Deneulin and McGregor (2009) argue that reaching a certain state of being and freedom of choice might not always be good for the person or for society. Therefore, the ideas associated with consciousness-raising processes are important for community development. However, critiques of false consciousness suggest that these processes should not be engaged in uncritically.

To this point, the discussion has centered on structures in society holding and exercising power and the role community development practitioners play when analysing power and facilitating a power analysis with community members. The next section discusses the extent to which community development can influence powerful structures so people from particular groups in society are not automatically disadvantaged by the policies of those structures.

5.4.3. Influencing Powerful Structures

Community development processes are used to provide a voice for particular groups in society, with the aim of influencing powerful structures about the impact they have. In the following example, Q8's perception is that the impact of policies on some groups in society is not automatically recognised.

...supporting a small group so they can work within those structures. A structure of their own, which then gives them some power and authority and a chance for their voice to be heard (Q8).

Q8's aim is for a group's voice to be heard and therefore influence structures that oppress. Yet hearing a group's perspective does not guarantee a particular policy or stance will be changed. Q3's complementary perspective emphasises the perception that for a group's viewpoint to be heard and to increase the chances of that group influencing a more powerful structure, they may need to band together with others to increase their power.

It's quite difficult for unorganised groups to communicate with organised groups, so structure can elevate an issue through the structuring of it. So like-structure can talk to like-structure, because individuals and little groups can be excluded from those types of discussions. And sometimes it's really important to have some sort of collaboration, or association so you can have clout³. So you make an association with a group that's got clout...it's realising power, as well as fighting for power, stepping into power (Q3).

Influencing powerful structures was explored further at interview when the question was asked, "Have you been involved in processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of a community development process in which you've participated?" Eight participants said "no", discussing their perception about the barriers to this work. A further nine said, "yes", with four of those giving a very clear example of how this had occurred. Another five participants showed ambivalence when answering, for example, replying "no", and then giving an illustration of where it *had* occurred, commenting that the process was not entirely successful or achievements had regressed over time. Some

³ A colloquialism referring to having influence.

comments from this latter group include, “I’d like to say yes, but it’s really difficult” (V5); or, “to a degree...there’s always more struggle”(Q1); or, “very seldom” (V11).

Despite the analysis that oppressive structures need to be transformed, and despite the analysis that community development can influence powerful structures, these practitioners’ perceptions of success in this endeavour are relatively low. This begs the question about the efficacy of community development as an approach when attempting to transform powerful structures. Other types of processes, for example, systemic advocacy or law reform, may be more effective strategies to complement community development in these endeavours. However, what seems clear from this discussion is that practitioners believe there is a pivotal role for community development to form relationships with people affected adversely by powerful structures and to engage in consciousness-raising processes about oppression. If collective actions through community development processes are undertaken as a result, and people’s agency is increased, these may be empowering for individuals and groups. Ways in which community development increases the power of subjugated groups is discussed further in the next sub-section.

5.4.4. Empowerment

Every practitioner told stories at interview of their perceptions of community members’ increased empowerment because of their involvement in community development, with 13 explicitly using the term. Others used phrases in place of the word that meant the same thing. For example, Q10 told a story of a person with an intellectual disability who was supported to connect with others in her community wanting to learn to read and write. Subsequently, by attaining resources, the group undertook a successful literacy and numeracy project. Q10 concluded the story with comments about how community development is empowering for individuals and encourages people to get involved in their communities.

You’re actually involved in a process that is helping that person to be in touch with their power, enhance their power, increase their capacity, to actually not just grow as a person, but in their capacity to engage, influence their society in very significant ways (Q10).

V12's comments below illustrate the type of analysis discussed in the previous section on influencing powerful structures. The following quote shows a link that can be made between the concepts, disadvantage, consciousness-raising and agency, resulting in people's empowerment.

People here have talked to me about the childcare issue; it's come up a lot. Then I explain in a simple, quick form, basically why it's working that way. So they've said, 'Well, we want more child care'. I've said, 'look, to get what you want, quickly, in the next say, year or two, it probably won't happen'. Like we'll be sitting here in ten years maybe, talking about the same thing. 'So if we want to look at another model, we might have to create something ourselves. One thing you could look at...we could get some funding and resources to employ some child care workers, and make our own child care program, to suit what you're talking about. But if you want the system to change, this is what is happening at the moment'. As soon as they get the information, they're more empowered to make a better decision. 'Ok, let's not fight that'. Or, it might be quite powerful if *they* choose to fight it, more than workers (V12, original emphasis).

This narrative is a continuation of V12's description of the social policy designed to assist migrants with English classes and childcare referred to earlier (Section 5.3.3 Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice). By suggesting a range of strategies to address migrants' need for childcare, V12 is facilitating a collective analysis among community members about how to proceed. V12's emphasis on "if *they* choose to fight it", suggests that citizen advocacy and action around particular issues can be more powerful or effective than if a worker or a group of workers engage in systemic advocacy or other worker-led strategies. Several practitioners discussed the idea that community development is more powerful when, as politicized citizens, people engage in their own direct action, particularly if that action is targeted towards politicians who have the ability to influence policies.

Both practitioner and community member structural analysis is important when looking to bring about social change. The next sub-section discusses particularities of having a structural analysis.

5.4.5. A Structural Analysis

As indicated in section 5.2, when provided with the four prompt words on structure, only one practitioner answered the question by talking about “a structural analysis”. In that case, the reference was about practitioners’ roles in facilitating community members’ structural analysis. Yet, given the emphasis practitioners placed on power as the cause of oppression, it can be interpreted that they believe undertaking a structural analysis (Ledwith 2011; Mullaly 2007) themselves is very important. Given the limited explicit data on this concept collected at interview, the findings paper written in preparation for Stage Two of the study *did not* speak to the idea that practitioners need to have a structural analysis to inform their work. When the question was asked at the Queensland group meeting, “Are there any major components of what you thought of as ‘structural community development’ missing from the paper?”, the paper’s lack of discussion about practitioners having a structural analysis was raised. QM3 described a number of connecting ideas:

So I see that linkage between...‘structural analysis’, to understand the disadvantage that’s created within the structures we live in, and how that relates to ‘relationship-building’. And how it relates to ‘participation’ and ‘decision-making’, and how that then relates to ‘change’ (QM3).

This perception, that a structural analysis needs to inform *all* the processes of community development and the type of social change being sought, became one of the subjects for discussion at the Queensland group meeting. The five other attendees responded to QM3’s comments by agreeing with QM3’s perception that a structural analysis is *integral* to their practice. QM7’s response illustrates the type of comments made at the meeting:

I think *it is* part of my practice to have an ongoing structural analysis...(and) there are certain things I look at in that. I do think I look at the political milieu we’re all hanging in, and interconnected in, because I think that informs so much of our every day living. And the way we relate to systems that are built into our society, to government, to how we think about the use of money, resources, what sort of access we have to organisations. I would be thinking about the social situation of the people I’m relating to, and what kind of impacts there are on their daily lives. There may be some structural disadvantage impacting on their daily lives (QM7, original emphasis).

After thirty minutes of discussion on this point, and to summarise this part of the group meeting, QM3 was asked to respond to all the comments made about the concept of having a structural analysis. The response was:

I think that was great conversation...I think what I've discovered from people's responses is that their ways of analysing what's going on is fundamental to their practice (many murmurs of agreement round the room). And it does *position them* in where they choose to work, what they choose to do. And I think the other thing that's coming out is, within that, you look for opportunities....which is the pragmatic thing..... 'what can you actually work on here?', which I suppose has always been the method. And we've got different environments and different constraints... but I think what is really clear after that discussion is that *it is* fundamental to the way people (work)...what they choose to work on, how they understand it. But, I think it hasn't come out in the paper (QM3, original emphasis).

QM3's comment, "which is the pragmatic thing", was made in response to one participant's earlier input. During that participant's turn to discuss the concept, they agreed that *they do have* a structural analysis, but they work in a context that is unsympathetic to this analysis, so *pragmatically*, they do whatever they can to achieve outcomes for the people with whom they work. Pragmatism pertains to the philosophic tradition that takes usefulness or workability, rather than a supposed objective truth, as the criterion for accepting ideas and judgments (Carlson 2012).

With regard to QM7's quote above, "the political milieu" comment can be interpreted as practitioners drawing conclusions from undertaking a structural analysis. An interpretation of a structural analysis is that it constituted by various lenses through which practitioners view both society, and their constituents' lives within society. At the Victorian group meeting, this was articulated as a *matrix* of lenses. This point emerged, for example, as a response to the question posed in the findings paper concerning the concept of 'class'. Social class was not discussed by *anyone* at interview and, because it is a concept found in the literature, a question for reflection about the relevance of the concept was posed in the findings paper. To illustrate the point about a matrix of lenses, VM4 commented at the group meeting:

One of the questions you posed in the paper was, do we not need to worry about 'class'? And I thought, 'of course we need to worry about 'class''. And one of the issues around some of that 'class' stuff is around the economic version of things. And I think 'class' cuts across 'culture' and 'culture' cuts across 'class' as well. And so I think you need to have the matrix of all of them (VM4).

Q1, at Stage Two, talks about the complexity that exists when undertaking such analyses:

I just think there are so many different areas and categories of contestation in the identity and culture realms that class is just one of many things (Q1, Stage Two).

Practitioners discussed a vast array of social realities they examine when making their analyses, including areas such as: health, housing, education, income, employment, culture and the impact of racism, violence, family and community life, identity and gender. As previously discussed, practitioners also look at how government policies and programs respond to these conditions. A structural analysis was also discussed as *intangible* qualities, the loopholes within these policy contexts. The particular lenses practitioners use to make their analysis are governed in part by their organisational context and their roles. Their individual framework of practice, which includes practice theories upon which they draw, their values, various sociological and political perspectives they hold about society, as well as their professional training, also informs their analysis.

Q1, at Stage Two made further comments about the various lenses:

Thinking about all those lenses, they are then acted out differently depending on time, person, situation, dynamics and location...so maybe that's where community workers are more complex about it. You can't just have an analysis of power in relation to gender and apply it across everything. We have to work with contradictory analyses at any one time. So, a postmodern structural analysis? (Q1, Stage Two).

Q1 is questioning whether their approach to analysis is a postmodern one. This suggests that Q1 believes there are multiplicities of identities (Shaw & Martin 2000; Ife & Tesoriero 2006) and forms of oppression to be acknowledged and worked with in emancipatory processes;

analyses that go beyond those with just a single focus. This study did not specifically investigate the single idea of ‘structural analysis’, so determining how many actual lenses, or how practitioners analyse through one or more lenses at a given time, is not clear in the data. However, from the points raised by practitioners when answering the interview questions around disadvantage, it was clear that the particular constituents with whom they work, or the particular issues presenting for a geographical locality in which they work, or these in combination, contribute significantly to their analysis about structural factors for people in those contexts.

The following example illustrates this. V9, whose community development work is part of an action-research project, is focusing on diabetes prevention with people from CALD backgrounds and Indigenous Australians. When asked why this project was established, V9 commented:

The background of why we are doing this is that the western suburbs of (capital city) have the highest diabetes incidence and prevalence, twice the national average. There are many diabetes education pathways, and our role is to coordinate all of that and to have a whole-of-approach into diabetes education...self-management (V9).

V9’s social analysis is around incidence and prevalence of a particular health condition. Issues about language barriers, employment, housing, and income support were also discussed in relation to this work. V9 applies a range of lenses when analysing the situation, all in the attainment of the overall goal, to reduce the negative effects of diabetes amongst particular groups of people. V9 is employing an action-research strategy so community members involved in this project can contribute to its development. They may also use the findings from the project to advance the knowledge base of the health promotion field.

The discussion on social class that took place at both group meetings suggests that analyses from various standpoints change over time, or become overshadowed by other analyses. The concept of class is a case in point because the term has slipped out of these practitioners’ lexicon. Various suggestions were made to explain this phenomenon, and below is one example:

First of all, I'm surprised, given who you interviewed, that the word 'class' didn't come up once. But on the other hand, I'm not surprised because it's actually *unfashionable*, and you know, you can attract a lot of ridicule if you use the word 'class' or 'classism', because people just label you as a 'commie' from the 60s or something. But...I see 'classism' *everywhere* in the work I do, and the structures of society. They're there. And we've kind of, in Australia, taken on this identity of egalitarianism, the 'classless' society; well, if you talk to some working class people slaving their guts out, and ask them if classism is alive, you know. But another aspect of this, is the consumerist society that is so everywhere. People I work with are so 'at the bottom', what is the impact of that society having on them. So this idea that.... class is for me just *all through* what we're doing, it's just not spoken about. Yeah, once you get into certain intellectual discourses, people just don't want to hear it (QM4, original emphasis).

Although the concept of class was not raised at any of the individual interviews, when the concept was made explicit at Stage Two, all participants stressed its importance. A critical stance regarding a structural analysis would suggest a more overt articulation of power and inequality. The literature indicates these kinds of analyses drive practitioners' thinking. (See for example, the sections from the literature review on Structural Critiques and Critical Community Development). However, the actual narratives indicated a far less explicit articulation of a structural analysis. The previous discussion on practitioners' structural analysis about power and inequality, and practice that has the potential to achieve structural or social change does seem to be a weaker, or less prominent aspect of participants' narratives. Oftentimes, the narratives indicated that practice has a localised focus and is about making the conditions of community members' lives more tolerable, as opposed to effecting more fundamental change so that people do not experience disadvantage by virtue of their gender, class, race, geographical living situation and so on. This discussion also suggests that, for community development to live up to its emancipatory potential, overt critical reflection on these ideas is essential. Ledwith (2011) argues that, in our contemporary globalised world where structural inequalities persist, it is necessary that much greater attention be paid to developing theory and skills to address these issues. It would seem a more thorough engagement with the literature that theorises practice from a critical perspective would be beneficial to participants in this study.

To summarise this section on power, over half of the cohort perceived structures in society as causing oppression. At the Queensland group meeting, consensus was reached that having a structural analysis about disadvantage should be central to all practice. Both group meetings and those who responded to the findings paper at Stage Two discussed a structural analysis in terms of it being multi-faceted, or seen through a matrix of lenses. The discussion on class suggested that various analyses wax and wane through time. All twenty-two practitioners had an analysis of empowering processes as an integral component of community development. Working in ways to ameliorate the negative consequences of power on particular groups by mobilising, strategising and influencing is, for the majority of the participants in this study, community development's *raison d'être*. However, a critical stance was also discussed by practitioners, one based on two ideas, firstly, that with power comes responsibility, and secondly, the realisation that *any* network or community development structure has the potential to oppress. A third critical discussion included what seems to be a lack of engagement with the critical theoretical literature around structural disadvantage and practice to effect structural change. This suggests that ongoing collective analysis processes are critical, as are processes to reflect on values, actions, strategies and goals. In the meantime, community development groups need to ensure they do not replicate the very oppression that instigated their mobilisation. Such action presupposes that people have a sense of 'agency', arguably an essential component of all community development. The following section discusses the concept 'agency'.

5.5 Agency

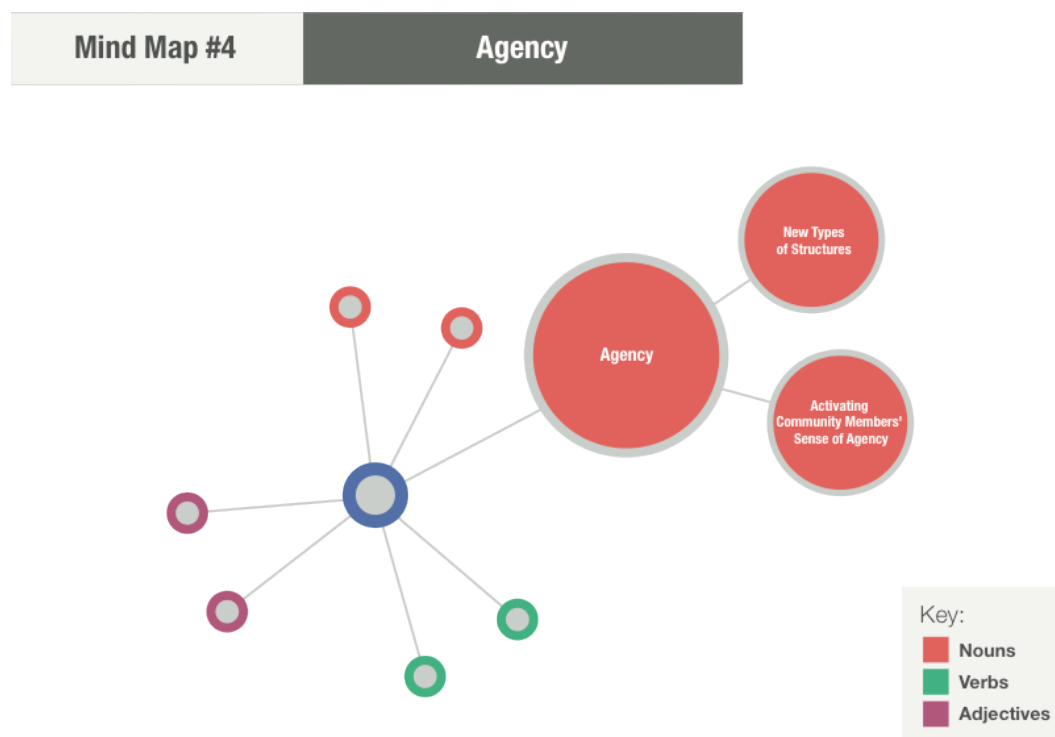
This section discusses agency and is the third category created to discuss the concept of structure. Agency is characterised as individuals who are autonomous, purposive and creative actors, capable of a degree of choice (Lister 2004). Another way the term is used in the literature pertains to the intentionality of actors, and their capacity to perform such action established through the agent's position within wider social relations (Connor 2011).

Concepts relating to these definitions were found in the data, although only one practitioner used the term 'agency' explicitly when answering the prompt interview question on structure. For others, agency was used implicitly to describe when community members become motivated to engage in community development activities. The narratives below illustrate

Lister's (2004) emphasis on agency and choice-making, and Connor's (2011) emphasis on agency and intentionality. The final narrative in this section makes a distinction between a personal sense of agency and a collective sense of agency, the work that takes place in the formative phase of community development work.

The diagram below, (Figure 5), is a visual representation of themes in the data about the noun, 'agency'. It is the same diagram introduced in 5.2, and focuses on two key concepts: that agency relates to the creation of 'new types of structures', and agency is about 'activating community members' sense of agency'.

Figure 5: Mind Map #4, Agency



V1, who had previously researched structure and agency theory, placed emphasis on agency as purposeful action to create new types of community development structures.

Well I'm a Giddens and Bourdieu boy...they've tried to understand the link between practice and theory and between agency and structure. And (V1's place of work) is also about evolving new structures; and these are a practice in our relationships

particularly, and even in our ways of thinking which create new structures. And that doesn't mean that then the old structures, the existing ways of being and relating, will just disappear. But what I find important is that we try out new ones, we experiment and hold that tension (V1).

V1 suggests that agency is exercised as “practices in our relationships”, and through “our ways of thinking”, which are signposts for purposeful ways to behave. V1 does not say exactly *what* the practices within relationship development might be or *how* a group should analyse situations, but V1 is drawing attention to these micro processes within groups. One interpretation of the importance of groups acting purposefully in these ways is so that groups can then *create* the conditions in which they want to operate. This highlights the importance of groups putting time and energy into reflecting on the quality of relationships they want and making explicit the kinds of analysis they are undertaking to strengthen processes and goals.

V1 does not think all “old structures” are of no value. However, when a group has put energy into thinking about how they want to relate to themselves and to others and, very importantly, how they want to be related to *by* others, then creating alternatives to existing structures and mechanisms may be a consequence of their analysis. This would be the case, particularly if existing structures and mechanisms do not honour qualities that the group believes are valuable. Therefore, they may find that creating new kinds of structures will best serve their purposes. In this sense, agency is about creating choices (Lister 2004).

It can also be seen that V1 is drawing attention to the place of experimentation and having the ability to hold in tension the contradictions in these processes. It is fair to say that dominant group behaviours are those that occur when more articulate, educated, financially resourced people have more influence over processes and, therefore, hold more power. V1's comments suggest that alternative ways of acting, where less powerful people contribute in ways that are meaningful to them, are somewhat antithetical to more traditional ways in which groups operate.

Community development practice that explicitly values alternative processes such as these may not always run smoothly or be comfortable for those involved. V1 is suggesting that a new paradigm is being forged with these processes. Some members may find such a

paradigm challenging, particularly if their analysis makes them conscious of a dominant or privileged status they may hold amongst the group.

In the following example, Q2 emphasises the dynamic nature of such structures. This perception can be seen as linking back to the postmodern theorising discussed in Section 5.1, about structures in society being pliable and able to be acted upon. Furthermore, Q2's emphasis is on community development being about relationship development, but supported by a good structure to enable those processes.

People who resist this idea of structure, I think, are inclined to see structures as something which is set and rigid and then you have to either kick it over, or blow it up to change it. But, working with systems, systems are also dynamic...basically through it all, there needs to be a balance of particle and flow. So, there's a good relationship between relationships and structures. The relationships are *well held* by a good structure and a good *overt* structure. So you can say, 'now, this is what I'm seeing that we're doing here...this is where we started, this is what we're doing now, this is where we're heading, is that how it is for you?'

The emphasis on a "good overt structure" relates to the definition of agency being about intentionality (Connor 2011). During the same narrative, Q2 talked about intentional processes to assist members of groups to become motivated and stay motivated in community development.

It's sort of a gathering in of the threads and a consolidating and a naming of where things are, and taking the time to do that so that people are *well collected*, and then, there's *the flowing out* of the next phase. It means that, from that place, everybody's got a good common understanding, people can move forth and feel validated and empowered to use their ingenuity and creativity and then bring it back (to the group) (Q2, original emphasis).

This narrative suggests Q2 has an implicit understanding that when people are "well collected" and that there is a "common understanding" amongst the group, they have agency. Significantly, qualities of action being described are those that foster ingenuity and creativity, arguably essential when seen in light of previous discussion on oppression and community

development attempts to redress oppression. This narrative also suggests these processes are personally motivating and have a self-propelling action. Q2's comment, that there is a "flowing out to the next phase" suggests that, when progress is transparent and acknowledged by members, these are sustaining processes for the group.

Sustaining group processes in community development is one thing, but freeing people's potential to act necessarily comes first. Q2 makes reference to people feeling "validated", "empowered" and can "use their ingenuity" and "creativity" when involved in community development. These could be interpreted as qualities associated with a personal sense of agency. However, practitioners often facilitate links from a *personal* sense of agency to a *collective* sense of agency. This is illustrated by Q9's discussion of the vision for a youth space in which Q9 works:

And all of what we've just talked about is a story about young people as a marginalised group...not just finding 'a space', but finding 'a base' by working together and articulating a voice together. So, we call this a "youth space" publicly, but we talk about it as a 'base', it's what we do, we provide a base for young people to come, and meet, and connect and find their ground here, find their feet, find whatever it is and go out and do stuff (Q9).

To conclude, structure can be viewed in terms of agency and can be seen as a necessary component for community development involving a range of processes. It has been suggested that creating structures and processes that enable and validate people's participation fosters their creativity and generates choices. Collective processes are seen as valid ways for individuals to work together on matters of concern, particularly when those concerns require a united and sustained commitment to action. A sustained commitment to action becomes the central idea when structuring community development work, and this is discussed in the next section.

5.6 Structuring Community Development Work

This section discusses the final way practitioners perceived the concept of structure, that is, the process of *structuring* their work. The actual term 'structuring' is not one readily seen in

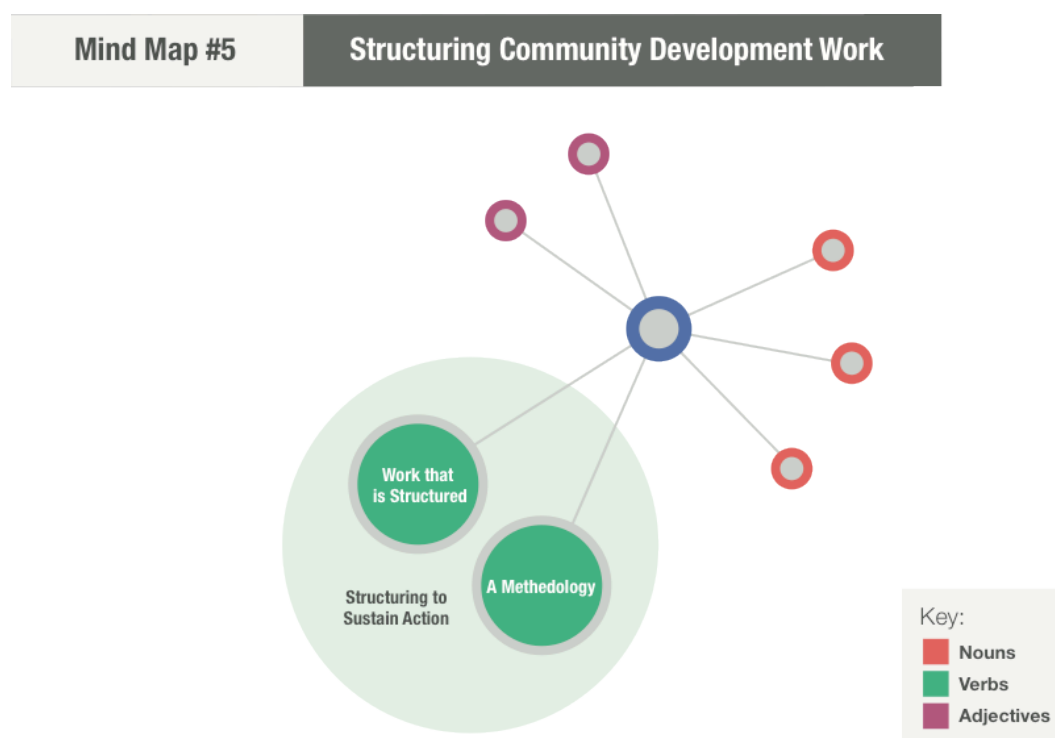
the community development literature. Some of the Queensland practitioners in this study used the specific term because of its association with a particular methodology of practice in which they have been trained. The processes of structuring community development are used more euphemistically, generally associated with broader terms such as how a practitioner organises their work, that is, the many and varied ways practitioners go about their daily practice. This section discusses ideas associated with structuring practice, and also the idea that practice is enacted at various societal levels.

Ten practitioners talked about structure as the ‘how to’ of doing community development work and mostly discussed micro-skills associated with group formation activities. For example:

There’s structuring of the work itself, at a relationship level, around the issues...so forming a group of people who will act to bring about change (Q5).

See diagram below, (Figure 6), which is a visual representation of the themes in the data. Like the previous mind maps, it is the same diagram that was introduced in 5.2. However, in Mind Map # 1, The Idea of ‘Structure’, the verbs included the concepts: *Work that is Structured* and *A Methodology*. *Structuring* community development is the broader concept, and is used to discuss how practitioners organise their work. Of those practitioners who discussed structure this way, one practitioner provided an exception to the others, particularly emphasising structuring as a way to sustain action.

Figure 6: Mind Map #5, Structuring Community Development Work



Q9 spoke about structuring as a way to ensure group activities are sustained over time, particularly when a longer-term strategy is needed:

Well, the word that comes to mind is something about “sustainability”. So it’s not the word, it’s the idea, that *structuring is about sustainability* (Q9, original emphasis).

Q9 provided an example of a piece of work which involved a complex structuring arrangement. The work centered on helping young people in a high school who were experiencing high levels of inter-cultural conflict. The key players in the structured arrangement included a local government youth worker, theatre arts workers, the principal of the high school and an academic who was providing support through rigorous evaluation of the project. Two years in, the project is achieving good results and has seen a marked reduction in inter-cultural conflict within the student body, as well as a marked reduction in the number of exclusions and suspensions from the school. When asked about why this structuring process was used, Q9 commented,

It is so we can have the right people involved in it; and they can have the right level of control. So to preserve the integrity of that collective of those five key people who came together and had a vision, we've needed to maintain a structure that left the authority to make decisions with that group, collectively. We, (the local government, Q9's employer), realised if we messed with that, we would be messing with the potential of the project to deliver (Q9).

Q9's comments indicate that the "potential" of the project is to give every chance for young people to get an education and advance their lives without degenerative inter-cultural conflict at school. Q9 is talking about how structuring this piece of work ensured the power and control over decisions made remained with the people directly involved in the project.

To achieve results, the local government needed to provide significant resources to establish the arts workers and develop the program. The results have been remarkable. The group had the foresight to formally evaluate the project as they went along, to both learn from processes and improve on outcomes. If the program was successful, the evaluation evidence could be used to argue for further resources and sustain the project in an ongoing way. That occurred as Council slowly withdrew its resources and Education Queensland took on the financial resourcing for the project, once it was proven to achieve results.

This is a good example of structuring community development work. Two structures, a local government entity and a state education department, were both influenced as a result of the community development work. They changed their regular policies and procedures, they provided resources, and they devolved power for making decisions to the project group, thus significantly benefiting community members, the young people from culturally diverse backgrounds attending the high school. In this case, this kind of malleability and flexibility is exactly the kind of remedial action practitioners thought was needed, when they discussed how systems and structures disadvantage some groups in society because of fixed and universal policies.

In summary, this section has discussed that structuring is generally about the 'how to' of community development. The high school example has shown that the group members' analysis was about a longer-term commitment being required to redress a severe problem. How to resource and sustain the project formed part of the analysis and structuring process.

This emphasis on structuring is one approach, and other approaches to structuring are discussed in Chapter Six, Methods for Structural Community Development.

Finally, another important distinction can be made about how practitioners answered the interview question on structure. This concerns societal structures and the levels at which they are located. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

5.6.1 The Societal Levels at which Practice is Enacted

Sites for practice discussed by participants were located at a *local level*, a *societal level* or *both*. Six participants described practice with community members at a local level. This is not surprising, given that geographic localities where people live and work often become the originating sites for community development.

However, 16 others described practice at both local *and* societal levels. This can be interpreted as them having a structural analysis along the dimensions discussed in section 5.4.5. Having an analysis of power, particularly power that oppresses and the source of that power, informs where practitioners undertake their work. The following example demonstrates V10's analysis about oppression and links to methodology:

I'll start with "structural"...I think of 'structural community development practice'. That we're working with structures within society for change *within* structures of society. And I guess formal and informal structures in society. And for me, they're structures that cause people to be disadvantaged in some way. So structures that create inequity within society. If we're talking about "structured" practice, well then I start to think about the way in which I would go about my job. So for me, that's more pragmatic, methodological type stuff, 'have I got a clear way of working, goals, processes, steps? (V10, original emphasis).

V10 is linking a clear goal, to reduce inequity within society, with the need to have clear ways of structuring the work to achieve that goal. Not all practitioners interviewed thought this way. For example, this topic came up at the interview with V3, where work was

discussed mainly at the local level, yet a structural analysis was being alluded to during the interview. To seek clarification, V3 was asked:

So you didn't want to speak to the 'structuring the work' question...you've alluded to it a lot, that you see the need for it, partnering and so forth, but you tend to focus on local, grassroots, group level work? (Researcher).

Yeah, I'm not political...I see some CD workers who are fantastic about being very political about their work; making these incredible changes in state and local and federal government. CD workers who've run campaigns to get better funding for the sector, and they're very good at that. Or people who've come up with these incredible funding structures and funding programs, because that's the way they think. They think in a really broad structural way. I don't think like that, I always think in terms of this, local. Always. Part of me would like to go 'yeah, I could do that', but...it doesn't interest me to think like that (V3).

V3 is discussing the idea of being "political" or political engagement as an area of practice that does not interest V3. However, as an element of 'structural community development', political engagement seems to be a critical factor. This was discussed at both group meetings. At the Queensland meeting, it was referred to as "micro-macro linkages" (QM3), and at the Victorian meeting, political engagement was described in terms of a federation of networks (Gilchrist 2009). Members of the Victorian neighbourhood house sector, at that meeting, talked about how creating a federation of networks has generated a greater political voice, particularly at state and national levels, about issues affecting neighbourhood houses and their constituents. This story is told in Chapter Six.

Practitioners apply a range of lenses to analyse power, and how that power disadvantages particular groups within society. The resulting analysis determines the degree to which practitioners engage politically with structures in society. The extent to which practitioners are prepared to engage politically varies greatly, as do conditions that detract from these processes. For instance, Kenny (2002) argued the 'charity'; 'welfare state' and 'market' discourses heavily compete with the 'activist' discourse, whose aim is for structural change and the redistribution of resources. However, the point made by V10, that a structural analysis directly informs how work is structured, suggests that engagement with the

structures in society that oppress *is how* community development can bring about social change.

It was discussed earlier that practitioners struggled to answer the interview question about evidence of powerful structures being transformed because of community development, that is, processes where community members are integral to the development work. This line of thinking has synergies with the concept of social movements, which Ledwith (2011:199) equates with the politics of protest or dissent. Three practitioners, V1, V4 and V10, referred to social movements when answering this question, naming, for example, “the ANHLC⁴ campaign” (V4; V10), referred to earlier in relation to a federation of networks; “Rural Australians for Refugees” (V10); and “the Zapatista movement in Mexico” (V1). Others made passing reference to the feminist movement of the 1970s and the disability rights movement. However, the paucity of recent examples was stark. At the Queensland group meeting, this was discussed:

It relates to how sophisticated this new world we live in has become at dealing with social movements with groups of people now. I look back over my...30 years...the sorts of activities that I’ve been involved in, you just could never do them in the same way now as you did them twenty years ago, because the *sophistication* of the systems that we’re working with in terms of how to *squash* local people, how to squash the individual (QM3).

There was resounding agreement with QM3’s analysis that people have become depoliticized by sophisticated systems that suppress their motivation or ability to participate in change-oriented processes, such as social movements. It has been suggested previously that community development processes can be empowering for community members. However, this discussion suggests that, at other times, working towards change can also be overwhelming. These concepts about politicisation and depolicisation are discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight. However, this discussion on levels across society in which community development takes places shows that practitioners are thinking about and making links between micro and macro/structural levels, particularly as these relate to their analysis about oppression and disadvantage.

⁴ Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to look at the concepts of structure and community development found in the data, particularly how practitioners think about these inter-related concepts. Practitioners analyse structure as having knowledge of structures in society, the system in which practice is located and how these impact on the lives of their constituents. By applying a structural analysis, one through which they examine power through a range of lenses, they look at the barriers and opportunities to influence those structures. Practitioners work with community development groups to facilitate collective agency, and so group members can address matters of concern. Collective agency comes about when members of community development groups have a structural analysis, and it has been discussed that there are degrees to which they engage politically to bring about social change. However, despite the small number of narratives about structural change, a number of practitioners articulated a range of approaches they are undertaking to carry out their objectives. These will be explored in the next chapter on methods for structural community development.

CHAPTER SIX: Exploring Practitioner's Methods for Structural Community Development

6.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter discussed the way practitioners analyse the concept of 'structure', this chapter turns to the practical implications of that analysis. This chapter addresses the second research question: "How do practitioners put this understanding about structure and community development into practice"? It examines the approaches practitioners said they are taking in their work. Given the frameworks they have developed, they were encouraged to explore processes they use to structure their work.

The following statement and key question were posed about structuring, and this was the catalyst for their responses. While their responses to this question were pivotal to analysing this aspect of practice, data about practice approaches from other parts of the interviews is included in the following analysis.

There are so many different ways that development workers utilise structures, or structure the work (groups, organisations, regional bodies etc.) to assist with the ongoing management of processes or to help sustain that work. Q: How have you structured some of the work you do – particularly ways that you consider have been helpful or innovative to achieving the aims of that work? (Researcher)

There was a vast difference in the word length of practitioners' answers. The shortest response was 164 words and the longest was 1669 words. 930 was the median number of words in response to the question, demonstrating that the majority of practitioners had detailed responses or stories to illustrate their approaches to practice.

The remainder of this chapter is set out in five sections. The next section introduces two key concepts relating to practitioners' focus of work. The first concept is that community

development work takes place at different levels in society, either at the local level or beyond the local level. The former is where practice is located within geographic communities, and is also referred to work on the horizontal plane of society. The latter, relates to practice that extends beyond the local level and may include connections made with governments, peak bodies or other organisational entities, and is also referred to as work located on the vertical plane of society. The second concept is that the work of practitioners can be seen as either led by community members, and is referred to as ‘bottom-up’ processes, or can be led by practitioners, which is referred to as ‘top-down’ processes.

The third section is a discussion on theory-action congruency. This discussion takes place because the data revealed a number of incongruities between practitioners’ responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work, and the stories they told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose.

The fourth, fifth and sixth sections are presented by telling eleven stories of practice. Each section reflects the combination of concepts introduced above, that is, work at the local level or beyond the local level, and, work that is community member-led or practitioner-led.

Implications arising from these discussions show that practitioners view the collective approaches of community development as vehicles for political engagement. They believe these approaches ensure that the views of people not normally considered by powerful structures can have greater political impact. The discussion also reveals that there is no single approach or method to engage in this work, however practitioners believe that having clear goals, an ability to analyse a changing environment and an ability to adapt to new environments, are crucial elements for effective practice.

6.2 Focus of Work

When interpreting practitioners’ responses to questions about how they practice, three categories were identified and are introduced below.

Structuring local level work. Eight practitioners engage in community development work located primarily at the local level, with groups of people affected by issues of disadvantage.

Structuring for these practitioners includes a range of processes to advance groups' aims. 'Local level' work is defined here as community development work that takes place in bounded geographic communities across Australia.

Structuring work at two levels, local and beyond the local level, and where distinct connections with community members are deliberately made between the two levels. Five practitioners are working at a local level and structure their work beyond the local level. They are attempting to make distinct connections between work at both levels by involving community members in the majority of processes. Structuring for these practitioners means community members are involved, as far as possible, in citizen-led processes. Work that takes place 'beyond the local level' is defined here as work that crosses a bounded area. For example, this includes work beyond a singular geographic community into areas with a greater geographical boundary, such as a region or a state of Australia. Work beyond the local level can also be defined here as work that takes place in other realms, for example, work with representative bodies of issue-specific groups and organisations (peak bodies), or work with a range of stakeholders, including government, around a particular social policy area.

Structuring work beyond the local level, and where practitioners primarily drive the work. Another group of nine practitioners work or have connections at a local level but also discussed other types of work enacted at levels beyond the local. For example, when working beyond the local level, they may shift their focus to encompass other strategies, such as policy advocacy work or networking with other practitioners. Structuring for practitioners doing policy advocacy work means they advocate for groups and issues *on behalf of* the people directly affected by those issues. Structuring for practitioners employing networking as the main approach means issues for network members are shared and decisions are taken to develop collective actions about those issues.

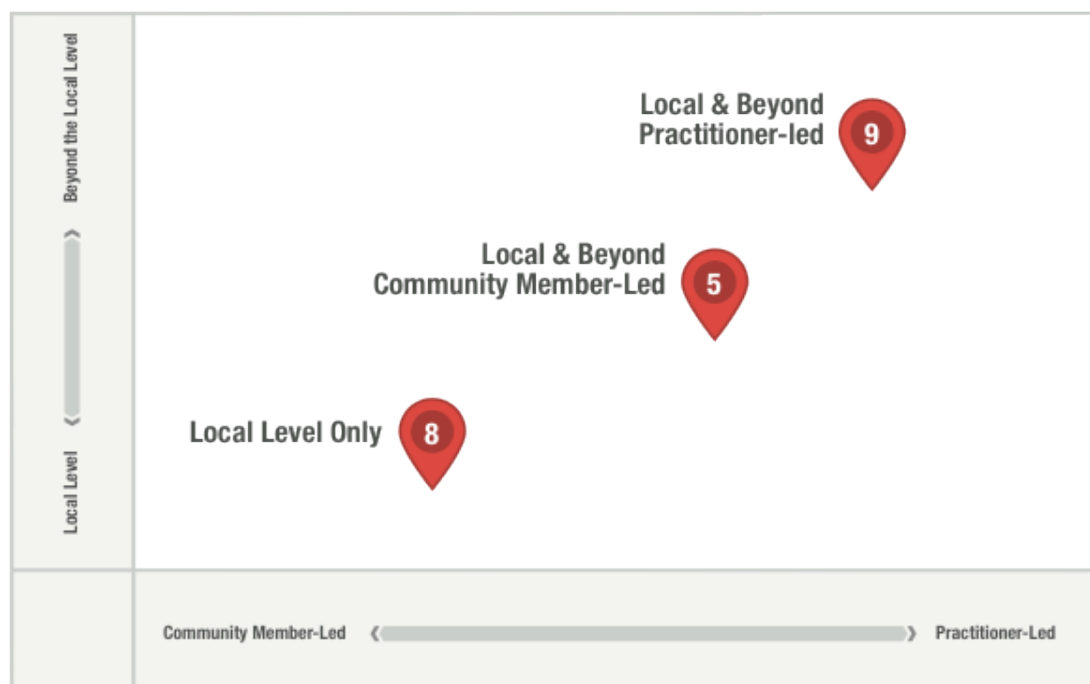
These categories draw from practitioners' narratives linking their structural analysis about power and disadvantage to ways in which they believe community development processes can be emancipatory for vulnerable populations. At times, the narratives were similar, in terms of practitioners describing their practice approaches. Therefore, in each category, each practitioner's case is described, however only some stories about practice approaches have been highlighted, to particularly illustrate differences or exceptions.

Diagrammatically, the categories can be placed on two axes. Both axes are imagined as a continuum, see below, Figure 7: Focus of Work Map.

Axis 1 - Local Level and Beyond the Local Level. Local level practice is work located within geographic communities. Practice that extends beyond the local level may include connections made with governments; peak bodies or other organisational entities.

Axis 2 - Community Member-Led and Practitioner-Led. Practice that is led by community members *is driven by and includes people affected by the issues* inherent in the practice. Practice that is practitioner-led includes processes of advocacy *about* people affected by the issues.

Figure 7: Focus of Work Map



This map plots the three categories of practice, introduced above. As a visual representation of practice along the local and beyond the local axis the map shows eight practitioners focus on local-level work only and 14 practitioners focus on work at more than one level. For these 14, practice extends beyond the local level and is explicitly linked to their structural analysis about oppression and societal structures on the vertical plane; hence the location of this work

reflects their attempts to remedy forces of oppression at their source. As a visual representation of practice along the community member-led and practitioner-led axis, the map shows 13 practitioners engage in community development work driven by community members - the local-level group of eight and the group of five located in the centre of the map. The nine practitioners who engage in practitioner-led or practitioner-instigated processes are plotted on the map approximately two thirds along the continuum, as opposed to the extreme end of the continuum. This is because, in all these cases, there are links made with community members.

The map shows that no work is conducted at a local level that is practitioner-led (bottom right), and also shows no work conducted beyond the local level driven by community members (top left). Although this study is reporting data from only a small sample, these absences are unsurprising. Regarding the first absence (bottom right), it could be argued that work conducted at a local level and driven by practitioners is not community development, but various forms of service delivery conducted in communities. These services are conceived and planned for by a variety of social service practitioners who deliver services to community members for their benefit. Oftentimes, governments with a social analysis about issues in communities fund these types of services to address issues governments determine as a priority (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). This is opposed to community development work, which mostly draws on a community analysis (Lathouras 2010) originating from the people living in those communities about their specific needs. With the assistance of a community development worker, community members collectively work to address those needs.

Regarding the second absence (top left), community member-led action on the vertical plane would be more akin to various social movements involving citizen-advocacy processes about a broad range of issues in society (Kelly & Burkett 2005). These processes involve many people, usually across a vast area. In their entirety, they are beyond the realm of practice for an individual community development practitioner. For example, social movements could include internet-based citizen advocacy, coordinated by a central body to engage with members and lobby around particular social issues⁵. Other social movements could include more traditional processes, such as those that occurred in 2003 in Australia, where thousands

⁵ For example, in Australia, the not-for-profit organisation, "GET UP! Action for Australia", mobilises members to email parliamentarians, engage with the media, attend events and donate funds to support lobbying on various issues.

of people physically protested by joining demonstrations across the country in opposition to the federal government's commitment to the then imminent war in Iraq.

The remainder of this chapter explores the categories outlined above and represented in Figure 2: Focus of Work Map. The discussion will describe their distinguishing features as practice approaches for structural community development and some of the linkages that exist between them. Findings also emerged from the data regarding the differences between practitioners' espoused practice theory and practice-in-action (Argyris & Schön 1974), and this is discussed in the following section.

6.3 Theory-action Congruency

Argyris and Schön (1974) are concerned about the effectiveness of professional practice, suggesting competence is based on theories of action. By theories of action, they mean behaviour that one might adopt in any given situation, particularly in new situations. Theories of action include two concepts. Firstly, "espoused theories" are used to describe and justify behaviour (Argyris & Schön 1974:21-23). They tend to describe what a person thinks they should do, or how they think they actually behave. Secondly, "theories-in-use" guide behaviour and influence the capacity for learning. They capture what one actually does (Argyris & Schön 1974:37). Argyris and Schön argue that the more congruency there is between one's espoused theory and one's theory-in-use, the more effective a practitioner will be (Argyris & Schön 1974:23). Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either one's espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24).

The work of Donald Schön (1930-1997), theorising the concept of the reflective practitioner, has been highly influential in a range of professional fields, including Social Work (Taylor, in press). However, multiple and contradictory understandings of reflective practice vary considerably according to particular fields and intellectual traditions, and even within writings of a specific discipline (Finlay 2008). From the critical social science tradition, the following critique can be made of Schön's theorizing. Processes of reflection on practice without an analysis of unequal power relations in society can equate to an exercise of "benign introspection" (Taylor, in press, n.pag). Practitioners may have a goal to undertake their very

best practice and use processes of reflection to improve practice (Taylor, in press). At the same time, they may adopt a politically neutral stance, that is, a stance where an overt analysis of matters relating to power, hierarchy and domination within social structures are sidelined (Taylor, in press). Conversely, practitioners engaged in critical reflection will attend to discourse and social and political analysis, seeking to enable transformative social action and change (Finlay, 2008). Taylor (in press) argues that it is not enough for the individual practitioner to be self-aware or simply to add to their expertise and competence through the processes of reflection, as Schön theorised. Rather, practitioners need to view reflection as a way to wrestle with tensions that exist in contemporary practice and, at the same time, demonstrate a commitment to emancipatory politics (Taylor, in press).

Placing the lack of a critical theoretical emphasis on reflective practice aside, Schön's (1983) work on how practitioners think in action has become 'canonical', as it has identified ways in which professionals could become aware of their implicit knowledge and what they learn from their experience (Finlay 2008). Acknowledging that professional practice is complex, unpredictable and messy, Schön's theory posits that, in order to cope, practitioners need to do more than follow a set of procedures; they draw on both practical experience and theory as they think on their feet and improvise (Finlay 2008). Reflection-in action and on-action allows them to revise, modify and refine their expertise as they act, both intuitively and creatively (Finlay 2008).

Because the data revealed a number of incongruities when practitioners discussed responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work (espoused theory) and the stories told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose (theories-in-use), Argyris and Schön's theorising is pertinent to this study. To further this analysis, a specific question was asked about any tensions practitioners believe exist between what they would like to do in their work and what they believe they can practically do.

When examining the data, five factors emerged that could explain this lack of congruency. These factors can be applied to the whole cohort, having impact across all the contexts for practice. Participants discussed these factors as either having a positive or negative impact upon their practice.

- The practitioner's organisational base and its mandate at levels beyond the local or within the broader sector;
- The amount of infrastructure that exists or is created and used as vehicles to take agendas forward, and to influence;
- The extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work and have reasonable expectations about outcomes;
- The length of time it takes to effect change and their perseverance through lengthy processes;
- The extent to which practitioners have an 'experimental' or 'action-research' mindset, which allows them to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development.

According to participants' positive or negative narrative about these factors, the researcher allocated a Theory-Action congruency rating. This rating allocation included the following logic: to gain a "high" Theory-Action congruency rating, participants needed to speak positively about four or five of the possible five factors, the remainder, gained a "low" rating. These ratings about the five factors become important when discussing structural community development practice. These are discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. Narrowing the gap between practitioner aspiration and actual practice creates pathways for effective practice, which should ultimately benefit community members. The five factors, the ratings and their impact on practitioners' accounts of practice will be discussed within each of the categories in the remainder of this chapter.

6.4 Structuring Local Level Work

This section discusses eight practitioners' work, conducted predominately at the local level. They take an enabling or facilitative role with community members when structuring their community development work. This involves working with people to create groups, creating structures to sustain those groups, and also establishing group processes to advance issues across a defined geographic area. Within this section (6.4), a sub-group of practice emerged and does not reoccur in either of the other sections (6.5 or 6.6). A group of three practitioners (Q4, Q10, V1) engage in their community development practice voluntarily, that is, they primarily work *outside* the funded social service system and at the local level. The five

others in this section and the remainder of interviewees across the two other sections work *inside* the social service system. The ‘inside/outside the system’ distinction becomes relevant when considering autonomy, and the presence or absence of restrictions on practice that occur within funded social service contexts. This will be discussed later in this section.

Regarding the theory-action congruency of practitioners in this category, four practitioners - Q5, V2, V3 and V7 were seen as having low theory-action congruency. Four practitioners in this category were seen as having high theory-action congruency - Q4, Q10, V1 and V8. The three practitioners who work outside the social service system are part of this latter group. Examples of practice to illustrate various approaches for structural community development will be discussed in this order, commencing with those with *low congruency*, followed by those with *high congruency*.

Q5, with low theory-action congruency, provided a response to the question on structuring that could be considered an exception within this group of practitioners who work locally only. Q5 answered the question about structuring by discussing policy and planning arenas, although examples of structuring work into those arenas was not made clear, suggesting an aspiration about the potential these processes can bring, rather than actual engagement in them. I asked Q5 the question:

What led you to choose to structure something the ways you did? The response was:

Well I think more than anything, it was the set of relationships I had. I think and (have a) vision that ‘if we could structure the work up into other layers, that it will be more powerful than keeping it on the margins, at a local level’. That it needed more visibility, more capacity at the other levels. If you don’t have the relationships, then it’s almost impossible, it’s not gonna work. One of the challenges for me in a piece of work, is always to look at the power relationships and try to balance those in different ways, or change that power dimension, in some form; even if it’s really small (Q5).

The emphasis on the relationships Q5 has with people who hold structural power across those layers, is key to practice. To illustrate this, Q5 told a story of a piece of work where local people living with a mental illness and mental health clinicians and bureaucrats were brought together for a forum about mental health. Processes were facilitated where forum attendees

were able to hear the perspectives of all who were present. So called “top down wisdom and experience” (Ife 2010:30), from people trained and working professionally in the mental health field, was not privileged over the knowledge from people with lived experience of mental illness, thus equalizing power differentials between the various groups of people attending the forum. The outcomes of the forum included an appreciation for and new insights developed about the circumstances of people living with mental health issues and also the significant role of community work when responding to community members in these situations. This story illustrates that structure can be seen as a platform or space for conversation, one that can have an educative and liberating effect on those involved.

Putting aside this example of local forum work, Q5’s response to the question about structuring is an interesting case in point, where a practitioner’s analysis may be considered more *aspirational* in nature. Q5 has used words and phrases such as, “vision” and “if we could structure” in the response, words tentative about outcomes. Q5’s answer began with this analysis about structuring into other layers beyond the local, however the remainder of the answer told stories about local-level work only. This suggests a disconnection between the analysis of how to achieve goals and the actual outcomes, or it could also suggest the presence of other barriers preventing structuring efforts despite Q5’s analysis.

V7 discussed structural community development as processes in which community representatives acted on an “advisory committee”. In addition to working with local groups, V7 has created other mechanisms for community members’ involvement in processes that have a broader emphasis beyond those directly affecting members of an individual group. For example, the community members involved in these processes may simultaneously belong to a group that is issue-specific or have a single focus *and* be a member of another group that takes a broader perspective and develops actions about issues that may be common to a range of groups. Through these processes, the views of community members cross issue-specific or group-specific boundaries, and synergies are found to advance common concerns, increasing the political weight of these actions.

Two practitioners, V2 and V3, primarily focus on establishing groups or networks of local people to work together on issues of common concern. The following example, from V3, illustrates how a structural analysis about poverty and isolation is being redressed.

Story #1 Political Engagement through Small Enterprise Development

V3, with low theory-action congruency, has established a craft market to support local women to begin micro-businesses. The women have been out of the paid workforce for extended periods of time, often after years of caring for children at home full-time. V3's employing organisation takes responsibility as the legal auspice for the markets, enabling the women involved to support and learn from each other about how to establish micro-businesses and re-enter the paid workforce by earning an income. V3 discussed the community connectedness that has been built locally because of the markets and other "spin off effects", such as people learning to develop website blogs through which they display and sell their homemade merchandise, and also connect with other people interested in crafts worldwide.

V3's response to the question on structuring, "I'm not political" quoted towards the end of the previous chapter suggests a view that political engagement is about working with governments or establishing new funding programs. Yet, from a feminist standpoint (Hyde 2005; Stepney & Popple 2008), V3's work does suggest a form of political action, women's political engagement primarily at a local level. The intersection of the personal or private concerns of women and their subsequent collective public action in this way suggests V3 is enabling women to increase their participation in society. By developing relationships with others in their local community, they are less isolated and local social capital is being built. By supporting each other to learn craft-making, marketing and business skills, they are increasing their income, creating pathways out of poverty. By developing website blogs, they are creating global connections with other women who have a passion for craftwork. When auspicing this work, V3's employing organisation is providing a legal framework to support the women, which means the women do not have to pay for their own public liability insurance and can experience ways to earn a living with fewer business establishment overheads. It could be argued that V3's structural analysis about poverty and isolation has led V3 to respond in ways that *are* political in nature.

The remainder of this section discusses approaches to structuring from the perspectives of those practitioners with high theory-action congruency, commencing with those who work outside the social services system, followed by the one practitioner who has high congruency and works within the social services system.

Stories # 2 and 3 – Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations

With two practitioners, Q4 and Q10, both with high theory-action congruency, voluntarily work with local groups has evolved to a point that formalising in some way has become part of the structuring process. Q4 told a story about work to establish a small community organisation, a project with an aim to provide Indigenous young people with opportunities for employment and cultural development.

It will be incorporated under the Association's Act, the simplest, minimalist organisation that can attract funding. This work will be a far more enabling process. I guess that's where my views around structure are tainted or affected; I see the impact on how (organizational maintenance) detracts people's attention. I just think it's a long-term process. If you go for structure too quickly it can affect the process too much, distract or whatever. So, I've been cautious, but I've also seen how necessary and important structure is. So, I'm not anti-structure, I'm just cautious (Q4).

Q4 was quoted in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.1) discussing 'structure' as 'a system of organisational structures'. Q4's example in that chapter suggested a perception that formal organisations negatively impact on community members because they follow the Western legal system, which have complicated rules people do not understand. Q4 also raised issues about a lack of ownership of organisational structures, suggesting a greater sense of ownership would be of benefit to people.

This quote above shows Q4 is working with community members to create a different kind of structure. The emphasis Q4 is placing here on the "simplest, minimalist organisation" is significant. Q4 seems to be suggesting that it is important to ensure that responsibilities of organisational maintenance do not overshadow the group's vision, hence Q4's emphasis on a "minimalist" structure. This analysis suggests there are hidden consequences of maintaining formal structures relative to the ease of initially establishing them. By not structuring "too

quickly”, Q4 seems to be suggesting that if the group has time to analyse all the factors associated with formalising, any possible negative consequences could be averted.

Q10, with high theory action congruency, was the other practitioner who spoke about formalising, but in this case, the decision was *not* to formalise. Q10 was quoted in Chapter Five discussing a process Q10 facilitated within a network of community members, all of whom tabled 40 agenda items for ideas of community projects they wanted to undertake. Twenty households of people are involved in this network, in a suburb in a major city. The network has been operating for 20 years. When answering the question on structuring, Q10 talked about an innovative approach this network has employed to form a legal entity that runs *parallel* to the network and which supports aspects of the network’s activities (Westoby, Hope-Simpson & Owen 2009).

Well one of the ways the Xantha Network⁶ has operated, is that we’ve decided to be a non-formal network in which we can emphasise inclusivity and mutuality. In order to do that, we’ve decided to *not* incorporate ourselves as an association, but to remain a non-formal network. But then, to develop a parallel organisation, that can be an auspice for any of the activities that people in our network want to do within a legal framework (Q10, original emphasis).

Q10’s emphasis on concepts such as “mutuality and inclusivity”, and to “remain a non-formal network” suggests that the group’s analysis was that formalising would have had negative consequences for the network. Setting up this arrangement of dual structures means that *some* members of the non-formal network are involved with *both* the activities of the network and the governance arrangements necessary to support those activities through the auspice association. There is a direct and formal link between the non-formal network, and the auspicing association. The link is based on relationships, mutual accountability and a vested interest in a range of community groups and their goals. Their model has been successful for over seventeen years and the association has auspiced over 100 projects in that time (Westoby & Dowling 2009)⁷.

⁶ Pseudonym name for the network

⁷ Westoby and Dowling (2009) discuss the story of this auspicing organisation as an example of “Structuring not Strangling”



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
A U S T R A L I A

An exploration of the relationship between structure and
community development practice:

Towards a Theory of
Structural Community Development

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*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
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ABSTRACT

Community Development is known as both a social practice and a professional field, often associated in Australia with the social and human services. Community development is a complex and highly contested form of practice because of the myriad theoretical positions that inform it and its applicability to diverse contexts. Its complexity also emanates from the variety of methods utilised in the work, groups of people involved and the diverse training and backgrounds of practitioners. This study can be characterised as ‘practitioner research’, that is, research arising from my experiences as a community development practitioner.

The complexity and contestation about community development’s purpose is also reflected in the literature. Propositional knowledge exists about the capacity of community development to be a vehicle through which structural disadvantage, that is, the root causes of poverty and inequality, can be alleviated. This analysis stems from structuralist theorising about social problems as arising from a specific context, not the failings of individuals. Structural theories also provide an analysis about inherent conflicts that exist in society whereby certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others. These analyses consider issues of social and economic inequality, the distribution of wealth, and the subsequent access this gives some people to political and other types of power. The purpose of this research was to explore the structural dimensions of poverty and disadvantage and how community development, as a practice, works to redress such conditions in society. The research project became a vehicle through which assumptions could be explored, challenged and a deeper understanding about practice developed.

As a practitioner within the Australian social service sector, I was aware that collective approaches to practice had lost some traction. Individual approaches to social service work had ascendancy and this, coupled with a lack of training and educational opportunities, seemed to place the field at risk of losing knowledge and skills about the practice. Further, there exists a paucity of literature in areas of theory and research, particularly empirical research exploring structural aspects of community development practice. The social and political sciences have conceptualized the notion of the structural and have provided models about social reality. Community development theorists, particularly those writing from a critical theoretical perspective, have, to a degree, provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. However, these ideas and their relationship to

community development have not been fully investigated from the perspective of practitioner-theorising, or *re-theorising*, as it takes place in practice. In summary, a theory-practice divide exists for structural community development.

The research project sought to make some progress towards rectifying this situation, that is, to gain an understanding of how concepts within the literature are being used or re-theorised in everyday practice. The research project employed an iterative approach, meaning that theory, data generation and data analysis were developed simultaneously in a dialectical process. A two-staged process of empirical investigation was employed. Stage One involved conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with twenty-two experienced Australian community development practitioners. The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise, known as consensus conferences, with practitioners who had previously been interviewed during Stage One. Their construction of reality and their way of conceptualising and giving meaning to their social world has been interpreted and analysed, providing theoretical insights about structural aspects of practice.

A core finding suggests that structural community development is underpinned by a *multi-faceted theory*. The facets include: the *structural*, that is, the analysis practitioners have about the *diverse meanings of structure*; the *act of structuring*, that is, the purposeful action undertaken, particularly as it relates to forming a base from which action is structured beyond the local level; and the *structured*, that is, the *type of structures developed* and maintained to hold community development work whilst it is in process.

The data suggests a normative model for structural community development. This model is based on three frameworks *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. This thesis posits a theory that holds an emancipatory agenda, that is, ways to redress inequality, and draws from both modernist and postmodernist theorising. It provides a useful theory for practice, one that sits alongside other models and approaches and relevant to contemporary contexts.

The thesis concludes with a discussion about the implications for further research, community development education, and processes in which practitioners can build community development praxis.

Declaration by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	XIII
LIST OF TABLES	XIV
LIST OF APPENDICES	XV
TERMS USED THROUGHOUT THIS THESIS	XVI
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 MY JOURNEY TO RESEARCH	2
1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	4
1.4 RESEARCH AIMS	5
1.5 GUIDE TO THESIS CHAPTERS	7
CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE NATURE OF ‘STRUCTURE’	12
2.1 INTRODUCTION	12
2.2 THE CONCEPT OF ‘STRUCTURE’	12
2.2.1 <i>Classical Sociological Theory</i>	14
2.2.2 <i>Structure as Conceived through Structuralism</i>	14
2.2.3 <i>Structure as Conceived through Conflict Theories</i>	15
2.2.4 <i>Structure as Symbolic Interactionism</i>	17
2.2.5 <i>Micro-Macro and Structure-Agency Integration</i>	18
2.2.6 <i>Post-structuralism</i>	19
2.3 CONCLUSION	21
CHAPTER THREE: THE CONCEPT OF STRUCTURE IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	22
3.1 INTRODUCTION	22
3.2 THEORETICAL EPOCHS AND LINKS WITH CONTEMPORARY STRUCTURAL PRACTICE	22
3.2.1 <i>The Importance of History</i>	22
3.2.2 <i>Practice Origins and Problems with Defining Practice</i>	23
3.2.3 <i>Consensus and Pluralist Approaches</i>	27
3.2.4 <i>Social Capital</i>	29
3.2.5 <i>Structural Critiques and Approaches</i>	32
3.2.5.1 <i>Critical Community Development</i>	33
3.2.5.2 <i>Networking and Structural Community Development</i>	35
3.2.6 <i>Postmodern Perspectives and Community Development</i>	36
3.2.6.1 <i>Structure and Agency</i>	38
3.2.6.2 <i>Reconceptualising Power</i>	39
3.2.7 <i>Social Democratic Reform Through Citizenship</i>	42
3.3 AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY WORK – AN OVERVIEW	45
<i>Cooperatives and Friendly Societies</i>	46
<i>Australian Social Policy and the Welfare State</i>	47
<i>The Rise of Activism and Social Reforms</i>	47
<i>New Right Politics and Their Reforms</i>	49
<i>Contemporary Contexts and Practices</i>	49
3.4 SUMMARISING THE CONCEPT OF ‘STRUCTURE’ AND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT LITERATURE	53
3.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS RESEARCH	56
3.5.1 <i>Conceptual Framework</i>	57
3.6 CONCLUSION	60

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY FOR EXPLORING STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	61
4.1 INTRODUCTION	61
4.2 EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH	61
4.3 A PRACTITIONER RESEARCH STUDY	64
4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW	67
4.5 THE METHODS	69
4.5.1 <i>Criteria for Choosing Participants</i>	69
4.5.2 <i>Sampling Processes to find Participants</i>	71
4.5.3 <i>Description of the Sample</i>	74
4.5.4 <i>Gaining Consent to Participate</i>	78
4.5.5 <i>Conducting the Stage One Interviews</i>	78
4.5.5.1 <i>Recording of the Interviews</i>	80
4.5.6 <i>Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference Groups</i>	80
4.5.6.1 <i>Meeting Agenda</i>	81
4.5.6.2 <i>Nominal Group Technique</i>	82
4.5.6.3 <i>Use of an Observer</i>	83
4.5.7 <i>Ethics</i>	84
4.5.8 <i>Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data</i>	84
4.6 THE ANALYSIS PROCESS	85
4.6.1 <i>Analysis Process of Stage One</i>	87
4.6.2 <i>The Findings Paper</i>	87
4.6.3 <i>Subsequent Analysis Process of Stages One and Two</i>	89
4.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	91
4.7.1 <i>Issues of Trustworthiness</i>	91
4.7.2 <i>Other Limitations, Delimitation and Difficulties</i>	92
4.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	93
CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING PRACTITIONER’S ANALYSIS ON STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	94
5.1 INTRODUCTION	94
5.2 THE IDEA OF “STRUCTURE”	96
5.3 STRUCTURES IN SOCIETY	102
5.3.1 <i>A System of Organisational Structures</i>	103
5.3.1.1 <i>Mapping the System</i>	105
5.3.2 <i>Organisational Barriers that Restrict Practice</i>	106
5.3.3 <i>Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice</i>	107
5.3.4 <i>Community Development Groups</i>	109
5.4 POWER	110
5.4.1 <i>Power and Structures in Society</i>	112
5.4.2 <i>Analysing Power</i>	113
5.4.3 <i>Influencing Powerful Structures</i>	115
5.4.4 <i>Empowerment</i>	117
5.4.5 <i>A Structural Analysis</i>	119
5.5 AGENCY	124
5.6 STRUCTURING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK	128
5.6.1 <i>The Societal Levels at which Practice is Enacted</i>	132
5.7 CONCLUSION	135
CHAPTER SIX: EXPLORING PRACTITIONER’S METHODS FOR STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	136
6.1 INTRODUCTION	136
6.2 FOCUS OF WORK	137
6.3 THEORY-ACTION CONGRUENCY	141
6.4 STRUCTURING LOCAL LEVEL WORK	143

<i>Story #1 Political Engagement through Small Enterprise Development</i>	146
<i>Stories # 2 and 3 – Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations</i>	147
<i>Story # 4 Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action</i>	149
6.5 WORK AT BOTH LEVELS, LOCAL AND BEYOND, BUT WHERE DISTINCT CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE DELIBERATELY MADE BETWEEN THE TWO.	151
<i>Story # 5 – Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform</i>	152
<i>Story # 6 – Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work</i>	153
<i>Story # 7 Building Regional Structure as a Vehicle to Reclaim a Developmental Agenda</i>	155
6.6 WORK AT A LOCAL LEVEL WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND WORK BEYOND THE LOCAL LEVEL DRIVEN BY PRACTITIONERS.	158
<i>Story # 8 Regional Infrastructure to Support Local Work</i>	159
<i>Story # 9 Regional Development Work</i>	160
<i>Structuring Beyond the Local and Practitioners with High Theory-Agency Congruency</i>	163
<i>Story # 10 Networking to Hear the Perspectives of Large Numbers of People, whilst Leading from Behind</i>	164
<i>Story # 11 A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level</i>	165
6.7 CONCLUSION	168
CHAPTER SEVEN: EXPLORING PRACTITIONERS’ FRAMEWORKS OF PRACTICE FOR STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	170
7.1 INTRODUCTION	170
7.2 DEFINING AND USING FRAMEWORKS OF PRACTICE	171
7.3 STRUCTURAL CONNECTING	173
7.3.1 <i>At the Heart of Practice – Equality and Empowerment</i>	174
7.3.2 <i>Structuring for Collective Action</i>	175
7.3.3 <i>The Structural Nature of Developmental Relationships</i>	176
7.3.4 <i>Community Analysis</i>	181
7.4 STRUCTURAL SHAPING	184
7.4.1 <i>A Nuanced Understanding of Power</i>	185
7.4.2 <i>Systems-Thinking</i>	187
7.4.3 <i>Incremental Social Change</i>	189
7.5 STRUCTURAL POLITICKING	191
7.5.1. <i>Hegemony</i>	193
7.5.2 <i>Structural Practice through Advocacy</i>	194
7.5.3 <i>Structural Practice through Citizen Participation</i>	197
7.5.4 <i>Structural Practice Beyond the State</i>	200
7.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR STRUCTURAL PRACTICE	202
7.6.1 <i>Communities of Structural Practice</i>	203
7.6.2 <i>Sustaining Self for Structural Practice</i>	205
7.7 CONCLUSION	208
CHAPTER EIGHT - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A USEFUL THEORY OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	210
8.1 INTRODUCTION	210
8.2 A CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT	211
8.3 STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - A MULTI-FACETED THEORY	212
8.3.1 <i>The Structural - Diverse Meanings of Structure</i>	213
8.3.2 <i>The Act of Structuring</i>	217
8.3.3 <i>The Structured – Ways to Hold Processes Over Time</i>	221
8.3.4 <i>Holding Both the Constructivist and Normative Dimensions of a Theory Together</i>	224
8.4 A MODEL OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.....	227
8.4.1 <i>Structural Connecting</i>	228
8.4.2. <i>Structural Shaping</i>	229
8.4.3 <i>Structural Politicking</i>	230
8.4.4 <i>Theory-Action Congruency and the Three Frameworks</i>	232

8.5 THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS THEORY OF STRUCTURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	236
8.5.1 <i>A Caveat - The Problem with a Normative Model</i>	239
8.6 THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION	241
8.6.1 <i>Theory-testing is Needed</i>	241
8.6.2 <i>Implications for Community Development Education</i>	242
8.7 CONCLUSION	243
REFERENCES.....	245
APPENDIX 1, PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	268
APPENDIX 2, INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM.....	273
APPENDIX 3, STAGE 1 INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	276
APPENDIX 4, EXAMPLE OF STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE USED IN INTERVIEWS..	278
APPENDIX 6, PHOTO OF A CONCEPTUAL MAP	281
APPENDIX 7, FINDINGS PAPER	282
APPENDIX 8, EXAMPLE OF A TREE NODE	283

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework	59
Figure 2: Mind Map #1, The Idea of Structure.....	97
Figure 3: Mind Map #2, Structures in Society.....	103
Figure 4: Mind Map #3, Power.....	111
Figure 5: Mind Map #4, Agency	125
Figure 6: Mind Map #5, Structuring Community Development Work	130
Figure 7: Focus of Work Map	139
Figure 8: Framework No. 1 – Structural Connecting.....	173
Figure 9: Framework No. 2 – Structural Shaping	185
Figure 10: Framework No. 3 – Structural Politicking	192
Figure 11: The Three Frameworks.....	228
Figure 12: The Three Frameworks Integrated.....	237

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Criteria for Choosing Participants.....	71
Table 2: Descriptions of Participants.....	76

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet	268
Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form.....	273
Appendix 3, Stage 1 Interview Guide.....	276
Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews	278
Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups).....	279
Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map.....	281
Appendix 7, Findings Paper	282
Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node.....	283

TERMS USED THROUGHOUT THIS THESIS

The literature revealed various terms to describe the field. These range from “community development”, (see for example, Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Ledwith 2011); and “community work”, (see for example, Popple 1995; Twelvetrees 2008); to the more general terms such as, “community practice” or simply “working with communities”, (see for example, Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Weil 2005). The approach taken in this thesis is to most frequently use the term “community development”, although, terms such as those discussed above are also employed at times. This kind of interchangeability in the discussion takes place to align with how the person, for example, the author or the research participant, uses the term to describe the field.

The approach used to describe research participants in this thesis also varies. In most cases, the term “participant/s” is used to label one or more of the twenty-two community development practitioners who were interviewed for the study. However, at times, the word “practitioner/s” is conflated with the word “participant/s” to describe the people participating in this study who are also community development practitioners.

The word ‘participants’ is not to be confused with people who participate in community development activities, that is, community members or others. Occasionally, the research participants in this study referred to community members as ‘participants’ but are *not* the research participants in this study. Words used to identify these people, as distinct from the practitioners who were participants in the study, include: “citizens”, “constituent/s”, “community members” or “participants in community development processes”.

Finally, the word “workers” is conflated with the word “practitioners” and describes people who work, either voluntarily or in a paid capacity, in the field of community development.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

There are, in this period of transition, two alternatives open to us. One is that the process of development and dominance, which began with the imperialist era, is intensified ad infinitum. The open fight between innumerable competitors, clashes and conflicts among them, will lead to the utter destruction of all values, institutions, societies, polities, economies and cultures of the world. The other will bring the process of exploitation to a halt and, based on the realization of the limitations of a 'development' oriented, limited society, lead the way to an altogether new set-up....The former will be a product of the prevailing theory of development and the latter of the alternate theory of social change (Dasgupta, 1974:130).

In 1974, Dasgupta was writing about a relatively new field at the time, 'peace research', which was seeking to reorient social sciences to make them effective for human welfare. Linking three themes, peace, violence and development, Dasgupta was arguing for a "no poverty society", one that is more livable, less exploitative and less violent (1974:130).

One of Dasgupta's countrymen, Mohandas K. Gandhi, defined violence as "exploitation, centralisation of power and dominance; all that retards free expression of the weak who live at the base of society" (Dasgupta 1974:34). Gandhi's fundamental analysis was that, if he pursued the truth of the matter (known as Satyagraha – the force of truth), he would find that exploitation and dominance creates poverty. This, then, would unleash the most powerful moral, social and economic forces available to rectify oppression (Kelly, 2005). In the Gandhian tradition, the development process is based on truth, not power, as a force of liberation for the 'poorest of the poor'.

This research project can be described as travelling in the metaphorical 'wake' of this kind of analysis about social change. It holds with the view that community development is a vehicle through which people can experience liberation from oppression, in particular, experiences of oppression derived from various structures and systems in society as they impact on the lives of individuals, groups and whole communities (Mullaly 2007).

The remainder of this chapter introduces the research project. The next section is a personal narrative about my journey to research, that is, the set of circumstances that led me to undertake the research project. The third section introduces the research problem, making a case for why this type of research is needed, and arguing for new theorising about community development. The fourth section discusses the aims of the research: to develop and explore analytical, theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. It is in this section that the research questions are introduced. The fifth and final section provides a guide to the subsequent thesis chapters.

1.2 My Journey to Research

I studied Social Work at the University of Queensland in the late 1990s, and specialised in community development practice approaches. The community development approach to which I was exposed (see Lathouras 2010) was underpinned by radical theory and a structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage. The etymology of the word ‘radical’ is ‘root’, meaning that, in this context, radical theories look for the root causes of oppression and disadvantage, and seek to address them at their source (Ledwith 2011). A structural analysis about poverty and disadvantage stems from structuralist theories, specifically the conflict theories (Giddens 2009). These provide an analysis of the inherent conflicts that exist in society through which certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others (Popple & Quinney 2002). Moreover, Mullaly (2007:17) and others argue that a structural perspective views social problems as arising from a specific societal context, not the failings of individuals. This perspective considers issues of social and economic inequality, the distribution of wealth, and subsequently, people’s access to or exclusion from, political and other types of power.

The set text for my undergraduate training in community development was Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire was writing about a related but distinctly different field, that of critical pedagogy. In this, he theorised practice methodologies for literacy education. The aim of critical pedagogy is to critically re-orient students to society, and to animate their critical thinking (Brookfield 2006). Freire’s vision was that, through literacy education, men and women would see themselves as makers of culture. Through dialogical “cultural circles” (Brookfield & Holst 2010:178), a rereading of reality takes place, resulting

in the literacy learner's engagement in political practices aimed at social transformation (Freire & Macedo 1998).

As my subsequent practice in the social service sector lengthened, I was aware that, due to a range of factors, the ideas of collective approaches to practice had lost some traction. Individual approaches to social service work had ascendancy and, from my perspective, the field of community development was at risk of losing knowledge and skills about how to engage in the work. It could be suggested that the dominant trend of neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism, creates a kind of 'amnesia' resulting from ideological hegemony. If, for example, prominent individuals from disadvantaged groups have surmounted barriers, such as racism, there can be a tendency to forget that social justice is about elevating whole communities; and changing the life chances of large numbers of people, not just individuals (Healy 2005; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Mullaly 2002). Working towards social justice is one of the key principles associated with community development and social work (Bowles, Collingridge, Curry & Valentine 2006; Kenny 2011; Ife & Tesoriero 2006), and this needs to be remembered.

Using an analysis of the root cause of disadvantage, my practice moved beyond just working with groups of community members at the local level. In addition to this work, I took on roles that involved working with and for peak bodies at a state-wide level. Peak bodies claim to represent the interests of a sector, and the roles in which I engaged for the peak bodies included: neighbourhood centre network development (at regional and state levels), sector development and policy advocacy work.

For almost a decade, I put energy into this realm of practice because, at the time, I believed that working at the level of social policy formation/reformation would benefit practice conducted at the local level and, subsequently, community members. However, the positive outcomes for which I had hoped did not eventuate. Despite the collective efforts of my colleagues and myself, structural barriers that had negative impacts on people's lives persisted. Community members *were* experiencing personally transformative experiences because of their involvement in community development processes. However, other barriers to their well being, those seemingly beyond their ability to control, continued to impact negatively on their lives. I was not seeing the collective or socially transformative outcomes that some of the community development literature argues should result from practice.

Furthermore, my decision to get involved in this kind of work left me with the troublesome thought that this kind of structural work seemed to deviate from one of the normative ideas about community development, that is, working *with* communities to facilitate processes of social change. Mostly, when working at these social policy levels, community members were not involved.

1.3 The Research Problem

The previous section has discussed the practice problem I encountered – how can community development redress structural disadvantage in contemporary contexts. Community development activities can often involve very practical aims, for example, to clean up a littered park, or to develop a community vegetable garden. However, the lesson taken from Freire’s critical pedagogy showed that it is possible to undertake practice that has dual aims, a very practical aim (in Freire’s case, to learn to read), and an emancipatory aim (the politicisation of citizens). From my perspective, these *structural* implications for practice were those that needed to be problematised. The term “problematising”, Baachi (2009:xii) argues, refers to how a problem is represented from a particular standpoint, and interrogates that and other possible standpoints.

My analysis also included a lack of clarity about which community development processes or methodologies could be used to redress structural disadvantage. I was well aware of the paucity of literature in these areas of theory and research (Burkett 2001; Mowbray 1996; Popple 1995). The social and political sciences have conceptualised the notion of the structural and have provided models about social reality (see for example, Blumer 1991; Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009; Held 2006; Lefebvre, 1999 & 2002; Martin 2009; Parsons, 1991). Additionally, community development theorists, particularly those writing from a critical theoretical perspective, have, to a degree, provided an outline of what is normative about structural implications for community development (see for example, Kelly & Burkett 2005; Ledwith 2011; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Shaw 2003).

However, although these bodies of literature have grappled with the concept of structure, it is argued that these ideas and their relationship to community development have not yet been

fully investigated from the perspective of practitioner-theorising, or *re*-theorising, as it takes place in practice. Brookfield (2005) argues a theory is nothing more (or less) than a set of explanatory understandings that help one make sense of some aspect of the world and therefore, he argues, it is accurate to say that we all theorise. Theory is not the preserve of the academy alone. It is produced and abandoned, refined and discarded, through everyday conversations (Brookfield 2005). Brookfield (2005:3) cites Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who argues that each person is a theorist because she or he “participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought” (Gramsci, 1971:9). Practitioners have perspectives on structure and structural approaches to practice and these perspectives warrant exploration.

Chapter Three concludes with a section about implications for research. It is argued more fully there that a theory-practice divide exists. The argument is made that community development has not fully integrated diverse thinking around the structural into its praxis. Praxis can be described as “critical thinking and dialogue.... that seek(s) to challenge conventional explanations of everyday life while, at the same time, considering the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions” (Popple & Quinney 2002). Therefore, a more nuanced view of structure is required, one that takes into consideration existing literature and those perspectives held on structure, as well as considering structure from a practitioner-perspective. Practitioners have a unique understanding of the practical realities of working with the complexities that exist in contemporary society.

In summary, as my ideas have developed, I have seen a need to theorise a methodology of community development practice that has an emancipatory agenda, that goes beyond mere tools and techniques, and that can be a guide for practice beyond values and philosophy.

1.4 Research Aims

At the start of this chapter, Dasgupta was quoting Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) who spoke about Satyagraha – the force of truth, and that exploitation and dominance creates poverty. As a field, community development is concerned about poverty and disadvantage. I commenced this study with the assumption that practice which focuses on structural change

seeks to redress the forces of oppression causing structural disadvantage. However, Baachi's (2009) insight about how problems are represented, and how taken-for-granted assumptions, or one's ideology and beliefs, speak to and uphold one's 'truth' have modified this starting point.

By placing the deconstructing nature of critical analysis at the forefront, it is proposed that effective community development has several structural dimensions, of which structural change is one. There are a myriad of types of community development activities and processes, and many of these will be personally empowering for those who participate. However, my hunch was that the definition of structural change discussed above is only one way of conceptualising the phenomena. The research project broadened out my starting conceptual base utilising theories from a range of perspectives and contemporary critiques and also from the insights of practitioners currently practicing in the field.

Frameworks of practice assist practitioners in the conceptualisation of their work. Explicit frameworks are particularly helpful when competing discourses create complexity in the social world (Ingamells 1996) or, when practitioners seek to hold a range of theoretical perspectives together simultaneously. Ife and Tesoriero (2006:321) argue "every community worker will conceptualise practice in a different way". Moreover, practitioners will build an individual practice framework, helping them make sense of what the work is about, and this understanding changes with experience (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Frameworks, which consider structural aspects of practice, are under-theorised and warrant investigation.

This thesis therefore, aims to develop and explore theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. This aim is achieved by exploring several bodies of literature including those examining the nature of 'structure' and community development literature.

From these reviews and the identified gaps in the literature, five research questions emerged.

Research Questions:

1. How do practitioners think about structure in their work?

2. How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice?
3. What frameworks for practice emerged from the data?
4. What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?
5. What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

1.5 Guide to Thesis Chapters

To begin to achieve the aims of this research project, various bodies of literature were examined. Chapters Two and Three are a record of this task. Chapter Two explores the theoretical foundations of the study, investigating the concept of 'structure'. Structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used within a range of perspectives across the natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy and discipline-specific fields. A closer examination of the concept involved an investigation of foundational sociological theories. These provide explanations about human behaviour in society at a macro and a micro-level. A historical overview of early sociological foundations was completed, exploring 'structuralism' and its theoretical critiques, including 'conflict theories' and structure as 'symbolic interactionism'. Critiques of both macro and micro-level theories relate to their binary nature. Theorists attempting to bridge the macro-micro dilemma call for a more dialectical type of logic (Ritzer 2011). Social theories that attempt to bridge these binary positions explore both objective and subjective ontological positions. This involves debates concerning human action and social structure and the extent to which consensus and conflict are considered factors within the social world (Giddens 2009).

Chapter Three continues to explore the theoretical foundations of the study and examines the community development literature, which was found to mirror some of the theorising recorded in the sociological literature. The community development literature was examined by looking at various theoretical epochs of community development. A historical view was taken because important lessons can be learned from a critical reading of the past, not only

looking for parallels and continuities, but also recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008).

The review commences with a discussion about the problems of defining community development because of its broad applicability. It then explores consensus and pluralist approaches and the theory of social capital. This is followed by theories providing a structural critique of consensus and pluralist approaches. Postmodern perspectives and community development are then explored, followed by a further discussion on human agency and social structure as these apply to community development practice. Postmodernist theorising and its emphasis on 'power' are examined, providing analysis about the transformative elements of practice. These reconceptualisations of power potentially increase agency. The final section looks at the concept of social democratic reform through citizenship. Contemporary literature on community development and citizenship calls for a repoliticisation of people, where active citizens have a voice about the kinds of societies they wish to live in and leave for future generations.

Much of the theoretical overview is drawn from British and Australian literature, although literature from other post-industrialised countries is also used. With a history of colonisation by Britain, it is not surprising to see a number of traces or parallels between British practices of politics and community work, and our antipodean accounts. However, there are a number of points to be made that demonstrate the particularities of Australian community work and the social policy context within which it exists. Chapter Three also presents a brief overview of community development in Australia. This provides a backdrop for subsequent discussion about practice in the Australian context.

At the conclusion of these reviews the theories associated with the nature of 'structure', explored in Chapter Two, are brought together with community development theories, explored in Chapter Three. Implications for research from these reviews of literature discuss a theory-practice divide for structural community development. To a degree, the literature has provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. However, what is needed is a contribution to the literature in-situ, that is, to see how practitioners are making sense of a theory of structure in the place where practice occurs.

The chapter concludes by setting out the conceptual framework for the study, providing a “tentative theory” about what is occurring (Maxwell 2005:33). The framework explores six theoretical elements including: macro and micro theories of structure; the theory of structural disadvantage and theories for methods and approaches to ‘structuring’ the work of community development; the theories of structure and agency; and theories concerning dialectical structures.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology for exploring structural community development. It justifies an approach for this study emanating from a hybrid of two epistemological paradigms. These include a social constructionist, qualitative approach to knowledge generation, with the knowledge generated viewed through a critical theory lens. A social constructionist approach is justified because different practitioners can interpret the concepts surrounding structure and practice differently. It is acknowledged that multiple realities exist for practitioners. However, this meaning-making process was not just looking for *any* aspect of community development. It was particularly looking through a critical lens when focusing on practice as a means to redress structural disadvantage.

The study is characterised as ‘practitioner research’, that is, research carried out by practitioners for the purposes of advancing their own practice (McLeod 1999). Practitioner research provides a vehicle for practitioners to examine their practice and challenge the assumptions on which that practice is constructed (Fox, Martin and Green 2007).

To support the qualitative, practitioner-led nature of this research, processes to support inductive reasoning were employed. The study employed a two-staged research process, which first involved individual interviews and later involved consensus conference processes. The first stage involved the completion of twenty-two in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008:51) with community development practitioners. The goal of these interviews was to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of structure. The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise known as consensus conferences (Minichiello et al. 2008:161). Data analysis took several forms including the use of mind-mapping, from which a findings paper was written and disseminated to previously interviewed participants. After the conclusion of the consensus conference groups, data analysis continued using the computer software program Nvivo

(Bazeley 2007), to analyse the data more thoroughly, which subsequently led to the thesis writing process.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the research findings. Chapter Five answers the first research question: “How do practitioners think about structure in their work”? It examines the kinds of *analysis* practitioners apply when approaching their work. They analyse the circumstances of their constituents, as well as the state of affairs within society more generally, particularly those that have a bearing on how practitioners’ constituents experience their lives.

Chapter Six addresses the second research question: “How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice”? It examines the approaches practitioners believe they are taking in their work and is written in a storytelling style, where eleven stories are told to illustrate themes about how practice is being carried out.

Chapter Seven presents various frameworks of practice being utilised by participants, by merging elements from both Chapters Five and Six. It addresses two research questions: “What frameworks for practice emerged from the data? What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner’s espoused theory and their theories-in-use?” In Chapter Six, it is posited that theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) is an important concept because greater synergy between a practitioner’s espoused theories and their theories-in-use leads to more effective practice. Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either one’s espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24). Various elements of the frameworks presented in Chapter Seven are discussed in terms of their potential for greater practice effectiveness.

Chapter Eight presents a discussion based on all the previous findings chapters. It commences with a discussion about the general limitations of the study, as well as the contribution this research makes to the field of community development. It also answers the final research question: “What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?” It distills various concepts and themes found in the data, and examines these in light of previous theory found in various bodies of literature. The name of this study,

‘Towards a theory of Structural Community Development’ is apt, as this chapter is an attempt to theorise a form of emancipatory practice, one that stands alongside other theories. It is *a step* towards praxis where, in dialogue, practitioners can together further theorise effective approaches for structural community development. This chapter concludes with a discussion about the implications for further research and community development education as a result of this study.

CHAPTER TWO: Exploring the Nature of ‘Structure’

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of the study, relating to the concept of structure. The first section briefly demonstrates that structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used in everyday speech, and has particular meanings across the natural sciences, social sciences and philosophy. Following this, structure is explored in classical sociological literature, with three sub-sections examining *structuralism*, *conflict theories* and theories known as *symbolic interactionism*. Following this, sub-sections discuss social theory, which attempts to connect theories from both macro and micro perspectives, and post-structuralism. These serve as a basis for further exploration of theoretical foundations for this study. In Chapter Three, the concept of structure is explored in relation to community development literature.

2.2 The Concept of ‘Structure’

Like many other heuristics, defined by Kelly and Sewell (1988:13) as keywords that evoke particular meanings for different people, renowned French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (2002:157) states that the idea of “structure” has been highly elaborated. It has had many uses and has become confused to the point that, when people use the term, they are no longer completely sure of their focus (Lefebvre 2002). Lefebvre discusses structure in three ways, firstly as both a construct or a model, the idea of ‘becoming’; secondly as something that is given, the essence of a thing or a set of phenomena; and thirdly as a mixture of both of these (2002:171). Structure, Lefebvre adds, can also be seen as an intermediary and a mediation between forces, for example, from above or below (2002:158).

Lefebvre’s first emphasis, on structure as a construct or model, is how the concept is typically used in everyday discourse. For example, the dictionary definition of the word as a noun refers to *a structure*, the way something is built or constructed; or the way composite parts are arranged together in some way so the structure is seen from the point of view of the

complex whole rather than any single part (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). The other typical way the term or its derivations *structured* or *structuring* are used in everyday discourse is as a transient verb, for example, to give form to something, to structure one's day or to structure or organise a project (Macquarie Dictionary 2009).

These normative associations of the term and its derivations can be seen across a range of contexts, including non-social science contexts. For example, in the natural sciences, structure is associated with organic biological structures or morphology, the systemic study of the form and structure of animals and plants (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). In physical geography, structure relates to studying the physical form of lands, regions and towns (Petersen, Sack & Gabler 2012), or in chemistry, it relates to the arrangement or mode of attachment of the atoms that constitute the molecule of a substance (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). The term *structural* is also widely used in relation to macro theories such as those associated with politics and economics, often with discipline or field-specific meanings. In the field of Human Geography for example, the term structuralism is associated with theories of development (Willis 2005; see also Craig 1998; Esteva 1992; George 2004; Sachs 2005).

Lefebvre's second emphasis on structure, as something that is given or the essence of a thing or phenomena, coincides with the way the concept is used in everyday discourse as an adjective, "of, relating to, having, or characterized by structure" (Macquarie Dictionary 2009). For example, one might refer to something being structurally complex or, because of flooding, structural damage occurred to buildings.

The concept of structure becomes even more complicated when one investigates the social sciences literature and, particularly, the sociological literature. The next sub-sections look at a number of theoretical perspectives around the concept of structure from these bodies of literature. They firstly examine classical sociological literature where 'macro' and 'micro' theories are discussed: *structuralism*, *conflict theories* and *symbolic interactionism* theories. These perspectives have been included because many disciplines within the social sciences draw from foundational sociological concepts when theorising within their own discipline. Following this discussion, the next sub-section examines more contemporary theories attempting to build bridges between both the macro and micro schools of thought, or attempting to overcome the objective/subjective dualism.

2.2.1 Classical Sociological Theory

Introductory sociological texts refer to three main theoretical approaches to the study of society: “functionalism”, “the conflict approach” and “symbolic interactionism” (see for example, Giddens 2009; Henslin 2010; Willis 2004). These categories can be traced back to the work of classical or foundational theorists. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) pioneered functionalism. Karl Marx (1818-1883) wrote about a conflict approach that was later labeled Marxism. Max Weber (1864-1920) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) theorised symbolic interactionism.

These theories can be viewed as being at either a “macro” or “micro” level (Andersen & Taylor 2002; Henslin 2010). Macro level theories, such as structural functionalism and conflict theories, examine large-scale patterns in society, while micro level theories examine small-scale patterns of social interaction (Henslin 2010).

2.2.2 Structure as Conceived through Structuralism

Henslin (2010:18) conflates the terms “functionalism” or “functional analysis” with “structural functionalism”, although other writers refer to these various terms separately, indicating that one perspective was influenced by another, or a newer theory drew from older perspectives (see for example, Giddens 2009:79-80; Mendelson 2010:299). Nevertheless, structuralism is a term used loosely in sociology to reflect any theoretical approach that regards social structure (apparent or otherwise) as having priority over social action (Scott & Marshall 2009:738). As a macro theory, social structure is the framework of society that was already laid out for individuals before they were born (Henslin 2010). Social structure is dictated by factors such as culture, social class, and social status, the roles people enact in their daily lives or the groups to whom they belong, and these factors guide individual behaviour (Henslin 2010). Furthermore, Henslin (2010) argues that social institutions in society are another aspect of social structure affecting people’s daily lives, often beyond their ordinary awareness. Social institutions relate to factors in the background of everyday life, and Henslin defines these as: family, religion, education, the economy, medicine, politics, the law, science, the military and mass media (2010:105).

Theories of functionalism can be traced back to Durkheim's theory of "organic solidarity", which argued that society's specialised institutions must function as an integrated whole (Giddens & Duneier 2000:11). Functionalists view society much like the human body, where different components work together to maintain the overall person. In a similar way, structures in society function together, meeting the requirements of a grander scheme (Mendelson 2010). Giddens (2009) argues that structural functionalism was the dominant theoretical perspective within sociology during the 1940s, '50s and '60s and two American sociologists were particularly influential during that time, Robert Merton (1910-2003) and his mentor Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Parsonian structural functionalism gave priority to the overall system and its 'needs' and that explained theories of consensus, that is, why societies hold together and share a common morality (Giddens 2009:81). As a social theory, Giddens (2009:81) argues, structural functionalism was always vulnerable because of its over-emphasis on consensus and agreement, as well as its under-emphasis on small-scale interactional processes through which social processes are produced and reproduced. Structural functionalism is also critiqued for paying insufficient attention to fundamental conflicts in society or radical social change (Giddens 2009:81).

Structural functionalist accounts have been accused of "determinism" or "essentialism", placing too much emphasis on structural locations, for example, membership of class or status groups, which, Bottero (2010:140) argues, cannot explain the diversity of people's lives. Problematically, structural accounts tend not to acknowledge the hyper-differentiated nature of social relations and also tend to view stratification as a mold into which behaviour is poured, denying individuals freedom, choice and agency to cross stratified boundaries (Bottero 2010).

2.2.3 Structure as Conceived through Conflict Theories

Like functionalists, theorists employing conflict theories emphasise the importance of the macro structures in society (Giddens 2009). Unlike the structural functionalists who view society as a harmonious whole with parts working together, conflict theorists view society in terms of a power struggle, where groups are competing with one another for scarce resources (Heslin 2010). These theories can be traced back to Marx and his analysis of the structures of a capitalist society. Marx's "the materialist conception of history" theory holds that the main

source of social change is economic influence, not ideas or human values, as Durkheim claimed (Giddens & Duneier 2000:12). Two themes carry through all of Marx's writings, Mendelson (2010) argues, these being a critique of the dispossessing nature of capitalist society, (combined with a belief in the inherent contradictions of such an economic structure), and an individualist framework of methodology, as Marx believed that people made history, albeit often unknowingly.

With an emphasis on domination and power struggles for resources, structure in conflict theories can be related to the theory of stratification (Oberschall, 1978). Stratification in sociology is usually applied to studies of structured social inequality. It relates to the systematic inequalities that exist between groups of people, which arise as an unintended consequence of social processes and relationships (Scott & Marshall 2009). For Marx, stratification was seen in terms of social class and the exploitation of the working class. Other examples of stratification relate to gender or race (Scott & Marshall 2009), where unequal power relations and domination can be seen in terms of patriarchy, Anglocentrism or Eurocentrism.

Marxism has been highly influential in ongoing sociological debates and also in politics (Mendelson 2010). Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, more than a third of world's population lived in societies whose governments claimed to be influenced by Marxist ideas (Giddens & Duneier 2000). Furthermore, Marx's commitment to the theoretical concern for the dispossessed individual in an alienating economy retains its relevance in the modern world (Mendelson 2010).

Contemporary conflict theorists have extended their ideas beyond the relationships between capitalists and workers. However, what they have in common is the way they expose how opposing interests permeate every layer of society (Henslin 2010). Unlike Marxism, which is considered a 'grand' theory (Giddens 2009), conflict theories do not claim to present any general theory of society but emphasise coercion and power rather than consensus as the cause of social order (Scott & Marshall 2009). According to conflict theorists, inequalities exist because those in control have a disproportionate share of society's power and resources, and actively defend their advantages (Andersen & Taylor 2002). These perspectives stand in stark contrast to the third and final sociological foundational theory, symbolic interactionism.

2.2.4 Structure as Symbolic Interactionism

As a micro-sociological theory, symbolic interactionism is the lens through which symbols – things to which people attach meaning – are key to their understanding of the world and how people communicate with one another (Henslin 2010). Instead of thinking of society in terms of abstract institutions, as the structuralists do, symbolic interactionists consider immediate social interaction to be the place where “society” exists (Andersen & Taylor 2002:20). This theory can be traced back to G.H. Mead, when he claimed that language and meaning allow people to become self-conscious beings (Giddens 2009). Because people have the capacity for reflection, they interpret and develop subjective meanings of objects, events and behaviours (Andersen & Taylor 2002). Moreover, meaning is constantly modified through social interaction. People interpret one another’s behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bonds amongst people (Andersen & Taylor 2002).

Social interactionism has been criticized for ignoring the larger issues of power and structure within society and how they serve to constrain individual action (Giddens 2009). However, Giddens (2009) argues that it is important to study everyday social interactions because these give structure and form to what people do. Giddens (2009) claims much can be learnt about people as social beings, and particularly about social life, when investigations take place into how people organise their lives, revealing the repetition of similar or contrasting patterns of behaviour. Giddens (2009:251) makes further arguments for social interactionist theorising because it reveals how humans can act creatively to shape reality in everyday life, as well as shedding light on larger systems and institutions because they too depend on patterns of everyday social interaction to exist.

To summarise this sub-section, whereas structural functionalism and conflict theories take an objective view of society, symbolic interactionism emphasises the subjective: how concepts are perceived or constructed in the minds of people and how these are altered through social interactions (Andersen & Taylor 2002). Structural functionalism notes that structures in society have primacy over the individual (Giddens 2009), that social structure is imposed. Conflict theories highlight that individuals are subordinated to society (Anderson & Taylor 2002), that social structure is a struggle for power. Finally, social interactionism argues that individuals and society are interdependent as, through collective meaning-making systems, society is created through social interaction (Anderson & Taylor 2002). In other words, from

this latter perspective, social structure is seen as a metaphor, where people interpret concepts and make sense of those interpretations individually or collectively.

2.2.5 Micro-Macro and Structure-Agency Integration

In the previous sub-sections, macrosociological and microsociological theories were discussed. The enduring dilemma for contemporary social theorists is to attempt to bridge or connect theories from both these perspectives, or in philosophical terms, bridge objective and subjective ontological positions (Mouzelis 2008).

In the late 20th Century, a movement began, largely within North America, which drew away from micro-macro extremism and toward the integration or linkage of micro and macro theories and/or levels of social analysis. Ritzer (2011) argues that the micro-macro levels of social phenomena are either objective or subjective, and social analysis must focus on the dialectical relationship among and between them.

Paralleling the growth in interest in North American sociological theory in micro-macro integrative theories, European theorists have concerned themselves with the relationship between agency and structure (Ritzer 2011:520). Although *agency* generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors, it can also refer to (macro) collectives that act, such as organized groups, organisations and nations (Ritzer 2011:521). Similarly, *structure* usually refers to large-scale social structures; however, it can also refer to microstructures such as those involved in human interaction (Ritzer 2011:521).

Giddens' structuration theory is one of the best-known and most clearly developed efforts to integrate agency and structure, with its core focus on social practices (Ritzer 2011). Introducing the concept of "the duality of structure", which is the balancing of agency and structure, Giddens (1984) alerts us to the mechanisms of social practices ordered across "space and time", which produce and reproduce structures that are the means and the outcomes of the action (Kasperson 2000:59). More simply put,

We should see social life not just as ‘society’ out there or just the product of ‘the individual’, but as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on which, at the same time, reproduce larger institutions (Giddens & Pierson 1998:76).

Giddens is concerned with the dialectical processes in which practice, structure and consciousness are produced (Ritzer 2011). Structures are both “made *and* makeable... through *structuration*, which is constantly driven by actors consciously *or* unconsciously” (Joas & Knöble 2009:289, their emphasis). Joas and Knöble (2009:297) describe Giddens as an “anti-functionalist” theorist, in the sense that, although he acknowledges systems in society exist, power lies with actors and their ability to effect social change.

Giddens, however, is not without his critics. Craib (1992) argues a single, neat theory such as structuration does not adequately accommodate the “messiness” of social theory (Ritzer 2009:529). Other critics, Smith and Turner (1986) and Turner (1996), do not believe that structuration theory actually resolves or transcends any of the classic problems of agency and structure, but rather simply restates them with further empirical illustration. Having said this though, Smith and Turner (1986) suggest that there is general consensus about the original contribution brought by structuration, which provides an alternative theory to structuralism whose focus is on the determination of the individual by structure.

Giddens agrees that debates and dilemmas still exist concerning human action and social structure. Questions exist about the extent to which creative human actors are actively controlling the conditions of their own lives, and how these two concepts of social life relate to one another (Giddens 2009). In a similar fashion, Giddens is concerned with consensus and conflict in societies. Questions remain about the degree to which societies are seen as harmonious and orderly, or whether they should be seen as marked by persistent conflict. These positions are not completely opposed, Giddens (2009) argues, and sociology needs to show how consensus and conflict interrelate.

2.2.6 Post-structuralism

One may choose to define reality as small-scale micro events, or as a large-scale macro entity, or by placing emphasis on objective or subjective dimensions of knowledge and

experience (Ransome 2010). However, social theory is still faced with the problem, Ransome (2010:209) argues, of producing reliable and intelligible accounts of that reality. Language itself is highly structured, and social theory's "linguistic turn" during the early 20th Century saw the rise of post-structuralist ideas and their accompanying concern with culture and meaning (Ransom 2010:209).

As a set of broad responses to structuralism, and as an intellectual movement led by French and Continental philosophers and theorists, the seed of the post-structuralist critique can be seen in a single sentence, Turner (1996) argues. When Foucault (1963) wrote, "a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable", the focus of theorising can be seen as shifting from the maintenance of structure, rigid formulae and hard boundaries to ideas of permeability, contingency and temporality (Turner 1996:216). As a political critique, post-structuralism was founded on the question of whose purposes are served by the current boundary definitions. It can be seen at work in discourses such as feminism, psychoanalysis and Marxism (Turner 1996).

Poststructuralism can be characterised as being concerned with the 'discourses' associated with a particular problem (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:56). It is through language we construct discourses of power and it is in the construction of such 'discursive power' that oppression and disadvantage are perpetuated (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:56). Mendelson (2010:245) argues that,

Discourse is an idea fundamentally based with Saussure's (and other semioticians) differentiations between language as it is used (what he termed *parole*), and the systemic and structured underlying rules of language (*langue*). Discourse, is positioned with *parole*, focusing on language's patterns with regard to usage.

It is vital to consider that discourses are nearly always temporary, given a long enough timeframe (Mendelson 2010:245). Ransome (2010:249) concurs when arguing that discourse is the prevailing mode and manner of accounts and conversations that occur in society, making one period of history distinguishable from another (Ransome 2010:249). The rise of intellectual paradigms, or "epistemes" as Foucault called them, are defined as distinct and identifiable patterns in how social actors from a particular period tended to think about the world around them (Ransom 2010:249). Derrida and Foucault made bold pronouncements

about the world that there is nothing outside of text or discourse (Chaffee 2010). However, Chaffee (2010) questions, how social change can occur if the world is so dominated by language that nothing exists outside it.

Giddens, also a critic of poststructuralism, asserts that post-structuralist radicalisms do not have an account of the social power played by structure in shaping language. He goes on to assert that context should be central to any account of language (Chaffee 2010). Societies, nations and cultures, like the natural world, are all structured entities. Chaffee (2010:84) argues that the best lesson to be learnt from both structuralism and post-structuralism is the dynamic play of structures. Post-structuralism is a powerful cultural critique, a way to investigate the hidden workings of power at play in the way people communicate and construct social meaning (Chaffee 2010).

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief ‘guided tour’ of the nature of “structure” as a concept, outlining some of its major or genealogical features, introducing foundational concepts and their debates, which are widely used in social sciences literature.

There is no end to the number of current debates across the vast spectrum of sociological subject matter. In 1959, C. Wright Mills theorised “the sociological imagination”, a concept that argued for a way of looking at the world that can see connections between the private troubles individuals face and the public spheres in which “issues” exist (Mills 1959/2010:7). ‘Issues’ have to do with matters that transcend the local environment of the individual or their inner life, and involves connecting various historical and cultural milieus with the personal (Scott & Marshall 2009). Willis (2004:64) equates these processes with a “quest” for sociological understanding of the world, invoking the sociological imagination as a form of consciousness for understanding social processes.

To further understand social processes, the next chapter is a review of the community development literature as it relates to structural practice, that is, making connections between community development theory and some of the theories that have been explored in this chapter on structure.

CHAPTER THREE: The Concept of Structure in Relation to Community Development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the remaining theoretical foundations of the study, examining community development and its links to the concept of structure. The following section is a review of the main theoretical epochs of community development since it began to be shaped by public policy. The third section takes a similar historical overview of Australian community work. The way in which this literature relates to ideas of structure or structural practice is summarised at various junctures in the section and is fully summarised in the fourth section. The fifth section discusses the implications for research, arguing that new theorising is required, that is, research that considers theory in-situ, or in the place where community development practice occurs. The literature highlights normative claims about structure and structural community development. However, *how* these ideas are being re-theorised by practitioners warrants exploration. Therefore, the fifth and final section concludes by discussing the conceptual framework for this study, one that shapes the theory-building aim of this project.

3.2 Theoretical Epochs and Links with Contemporary Structural Practice

3.2.1 The Importance of History

Community development texts commonly begin with an overview of the historical origins of the practice as a platform for particular theorising (see for example, Fisher 2005; Gilchrist 2009; Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009; Kenny 2011; Ledwith 2011; Popple 1995; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992). Likewise, from time to time, journal articles are also written dedicated to historical perspectives and their implications for contemporary practice (see for example, Kenny 1996; Mowbray 1996; Popple 2006). Considering varying epochs of social thought helps make sense of the present. Moreover, history matters, Fisher

(2005:34) argues, as it provides a collective memory and historical shoulders upon which to stand.

What follows is a historical overview of phases of community development predominantly drawn from British and Australian literature, although literature from North America and other post-industrialised countries has also been used. I have drawn from British literature because, with Australia's history of colonisation by Britain, many parallels exist between British and Australian community work and politics. I have chosen to take an historical view because important lessons can be learned from a critical reading of the past, not only looking for parallels and continuities, but also recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008).

Theoretical phases and political debates in relation to achieving social change are pertinent to community development practice over time (Popple 1995; Shaw & Martin 2000). Each new theory arose out of the critiques from earlier theoretical standpoints. Popple (1995) categorises these as "pluralist" community work theories; "radical" and "socialist" community work theories; "feminist" and "anti-racist" community work theories and, also from wider cultural politics, what has come to be understood as the politics of "identity and difference" (Shaw & Martin 2000). Thorpe (1992), locating community work within various political ideologies, provides similar categories to Popple's (2005) account. However, Thorpe (1992) adds one other category, "consensus" political ideology. Thorpe (1992:25) helpfully represents these categories on a political continuum. On the left, she locates "structuralist" ideology, in the middle she locates "pluralist" ideology and on the right, she locates "consensus" politics. She defines "consensus" community work as spanning both conservative and liberal forms of politics.

The following sub-section provides a brief overview of the origins of community development practice, as well as highlighting the problems with defining the practice because of its broad applicability.

3.2.2. Practice Origins and Problems with Defining Practice

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the emergence of British community work as an identified activity, establishing itself alongside casework and group work, as the third approach to social work (Popple 2006). The British-produced *Community Development Journal (CDJ)* was first published in 1966. The journal was established to effectively reflect the changing and dynamic field of community development internationally (Popple 2006). Craig, Popple and Shaw (2008) argue *CDJ* is now considered the most prestigious international journal focusing on community development. On the other side of the northern hemisphere, in 1970, another high profile community development journal was established. The *Journal of the Community Development Society*, (now called *Community Development*), was primarily concerned with practice in North America (Popple 2006). Like its British counterpart, it began as a response to a need. It provided opportunities to build skills and research the practice discipline of the newly emerging profession (Walzer 2010).

Forty-year reflections on both these prominent journals by Popple (2006) and Walzer (2010) highlighted a number of salient issues relevant to contemporary practice. The first relates to the breadth of contexts to which community development practice can be applied. In 1990, *CDJ* compiled a cumulative index of topics the journal had covered to that point in time, showing 150 different themes reflecting the diverse nature and applicability of the practice to varying contexts, as well as the evolution of theory throughout changing social, political and economic times (Popple 2006). Walzer (2010) argues that fully recognising the differences in community development across the world and learning from practice in these diverse contexts is a major opportunity for contemporary practitioners into the future.

A second issue for contemporary practice, Walzer (2010) argues, is to create a common understanding and appreciation of core principles of community development as well as a recognised curriculum for community development education. Students graduating with a degree in community development must understand a basic core set of principles, and Walzer (2010) surmises that members of Community Development Society, readers and authors of journal contributions, are uniquely positioned to identify and promote these among educational institutions. Walzer's (2010) concern about developing a common understanding of core principles forty years after the practice became formally recognised is significant. It suggests the very diversity and broad applicability of the practice is problematic. This creates challenges when one seeks to distill normative characteristics, those that might be considered relevant to community development as a specific discipline.

In an article in the second issue of *CDJ*, Biddle (1966) discussed the challenges of defining community development because of its “fuzziness”. Biddle (1966) argued then that confusion existed about the practice because of its very ubiquity. Enthusiasts of the practice can describe very different experiences but lay claim to the same title of Community Development, largely because, Biddle (1966) argued, of the varieties of method found in the work, the populations involved and the backgrounds of the practitioners. Practitioners are the ultimate “generalists”; capable of expediting whatever pro-social programs are evolved to meet people’s needs (Biddle 1966). However, practitioners’ training and backgrounds mean they tend to define the field and identify with specific interests, which are only part, but not all, of the whole (Biddle 1966). Furthermore, community development practice can be located within a range of fields beyond those usually associated with the social services. For example, in Australia, development practice can be found in the environment sector, the Landcare movement, Urban Planning, peace and conflict work and also across informal and formal groups, networks and organisations, including non-Government organisations and Government departments, particularly in local government. Similarly, Gilchrist (2003) writing from the United Kingdom makes links with the practice and social work, housing, education, anti-poverty work, health and local economic development.

In those early days when the field was establishing itself Biddle (1966) identified community development within the social sciences, suggesting how varying social science traditions provided different emphasises on community development. These include: sociological perspectives emphasising the structural concept of “community”; anthropological perspectives emphasising local social customs and people’s interventions in processes of social change; and psychological perspectives highlighting group dynamics and meaning-making processes (Biddle 1966). Traditions also include social processes such as action-research, which are particularly pertinent to community development because of the experimental and location-unique nature of activities, enabling learning and participant-planned change (Biddle 1966). An action-research approach is what Stringer (2007:11-12) names as “inquiry in use”, involving small-scale theorising for specific problems in specific situations.

Community development’s broad-based theoretical traditions, its applicability to various contexts and its use of various approaches, caused confusion within the then burgeoning

field. Therefore, Biddle (1966) offered a basic definition. Quoting from a previous work, he said:

Community Development is a social process by which human beings can become more competent to live with and gain some control over local aspects of a frustrating and changing world.....Personality growth through group responsibility is the focus (Biddle & Biddle, 1965).

Alongside the “fuzziness” factor (Biddle 1996), which causes ideological and theoretical confusion or contestation within or about the field, the literature suggests a number of core features which define the practice. For example, methods predicated on values of community empowerment and citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000; Shaw 2007); communities identifying and giving effective voice to their needs (Halliwell 1969; Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009); and communities being enabled to take collective control and responsibility for their own development (Kenny 2011). Other definitions view community development as an instrument to challenge persistent poverty and resist disempowerment brought on by globalising or macro-level forces impacting upon communities (Babacan & Gopalkrishnan 2001; Craig 1998). Still others emphasise postmodern theoretical orientations, highlighting differing and shifting forms of power, the construction and reconstruction of reality, and multiplicities of being, particularly as they relate to understandings of ‘community’ (Burkett 2001; Ife 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

Just over forty years after formal recognition of the profession, when practice began to be shaped by public policy (Walzer, 2010), community development is still today a “catch-all” term (Pople 2006). Pople (2006) makes this argument when referring particularly to the British New Labour government’s use of the term to address issues of social inclusion and disadvantage. While no longer governing in Britain, New Labour’s social policy agendas for “community empowerment” (Shaw 2007), “tackling poverty and social exclusion” and place-based “community capacity building” (Craig 2007) gained ascendancy and now dominate the social policy landscape for community development in Australia and across the globe (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009). This indicates that the ubiquity and applicability of the term has only increased with time, with governments funding a range of programs and projects in the name of community development.

It also suggests a politicisation of the practice. Shaw (2007) refers to “ideological elasticity”, where ideas of ‘community’ have been “appropriated” to legitimate or justify a wide range of political positions, known as the “politics of community” (Shaw 2007). Moreover, Shaw (2007) argues, the way in which community is constructed politically provides discourses and practices which frame how practice is undertaken at any given time. Thus, the politics of community should not be ignored. Collins (2010) also refers to the new politics of community and the idea of community as an elastic political construct. She argues that, by reframing the idea of community as a political construct, this provides “new avenues for investigating social inequalities” (Collins 2010:7) and can be a powerful organising principle for social justice initiatives.

In conclusion, as a distinct practice approach, community development in all its guises draws on social solidarity, personal and collective well-being. Additionally, it can provide a lens through which existing societal structures and practices can be scrutinized in order to find more egalitarian, supportive and sustainable alternatives, or, the “world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). The broad-based community development literature, some of which is discussed in this chapter, attests to these kinds of outcomes, despite the problems of consensus around terminology and differing theoretical orientations as they have evolved over time. Three of these approaches are discussed in the next sub-sections. The first of these relates to the theoretical epochs of consensus and pluralist approaches to community development, both of which emerged from conservative politics. This is followed by a discussion on social capital, a more contemporary concept in community development, which also has links to conservative politics.

3.2.3 Consensus and Pluralist Approaches

Thorpe (1992) argues that much of the ideology in community work stems from the British experience of the Community Development Projects (CDPs), which were established with a consensus model of community work originating in 1969. The CDPs were the central government’s response to problems of urban decay and multiple deprivation, involving the coordination of local services, and stimulating “self-help” amongst the “deprived” (Thorpe 1992:22). As a way to empower “hard-hit” localities, inherent within the CDPs was the understanding that well-being was good for labour market participation (Amin 2005:613).

The CDPs also understood that by increasing a sense of community, small-scale activity in the alternative economy could be spawned (Amin 2005). The architects of CDP had an underpinning assumption that the cause of the deprivation was the people themselves, because of their low self-esteem and lack of social cohesion (Thorpe 1992). However, the community development workers found these assumptions untenable when working with people faced with low wages, unemployment and appalling housing conditions (Thorpe 1992). A “self-help” response was deemed to be a woefully inappropriate response as workers refined their analysis to the causes and nature of the problems they encountered (Thorpe 1992). The ideology behind this version of a self-help approach to community development has its roots in conservative ideology, where the nature of problems is seen as a result of a lack of cohesion and community spirit, rather than seen as a result of inequalities which exist between different groups in society (Thorpe 1992). Subsequently, the CDP workers abandoned the consensus model as both ineffectual and offensively “victim-blaming”, turning to a pluralist model for explanation of social problems and guidance for practice (Thorpe 1992:23).

The pluralist model views social problems as arising from the “imbalances in democratic and bureaucratic systems” (Thorpe 1992:23, citing Community Development Project 1974:23). The role of community work in this paradigm is to help various groups overcome the problems they face in their neighbourhoods by mutual support, sharing activities and by attempting to secure better services for their members (Popple 1995). The shift is from one of self-help (as in the consensus model) to one where disadvantage is seen in terms of access to resources and decision-making (Thorpe 1992). Task-oriented community action, such as Alinsky-style tactics (Alinsky 1971), replaces more process-oriented community development, where the aim is to wrest from authorities the services to which people have a democratic right (Thorpe 1992). In these scenarios, the state is a neutral arbiter (Thorpe 1992) and has a role in balancing the competing interests represented, ensuring political decision-making takes account of a range of expressed views (Popple 1995). Unfortunately, the CDP workers experienced first hand the shortcomings of a pluralist approach when political decisions failed to support the deprived, no matter how sophisticated and confident they became (Thorpe 1992). With decisions made in favour of big business, a structural conflict model was adopted to explain continuing inequalities (Thorpe 1992). This resulted in CDP workers increasingly challenging the governmental bodies who funded the project, until the projects were shut down (Thorpe 1992).

Popple and Quinney (2002) argue the mediating and managing processes inherent within the pluralist paradigm make it a top-down approach. Governments fund processes of community work in the hope that social ills will be addressed in lieu of spending significant sums of public money (Popple & Quinney 2002). Although pluralist approaches acknowledge the structural nature of deprivation and recognises the political dimension of community work, with its focus on micro-change, it is primarily concerned with social consensus and only marginal improvements (Popple 1995). With a focus on 'neighbourhood', pluralist approaches fail to sufficiently connect with the production and reproduction of inequalities in the wider society, which result in problems in localities (Popple 1995). Popple's critique can be identified as from a radical or structural community work paradigm and is discussed later in this chapter.

This sub-section has shown, firstly, that the dimensions of structure inherent within consensus approaches have an inherently local focus, those focusing on micro-structural processes. The focus is on inter-group and intra-group dynamics, supposedly leading to greater self-esteem and social cohesion, and also on structures of service delivery in local communities. Secondly, the dimensions of structure inherent within pluralist approaches embrace a greater degree of conflict within the model, where a vertical dimension of structure is considered. Greater macro processes causing inequality across various communities are seen to cause social conditions locally. Processes for remedying that inequality involves forms of democratic participation where, alongside other interest groups in society, groups make micro-macro connections from their local community to policy makers. The concept of social capital as it relates to community development can be located within these paradigms of consensus and pluralist approaches and is discussed in the next section.

3.2.4 Social Capital

Contemporary community work in democratic societies has seen the rise and ascendance of "social capital" as a concept associated with sustainable community development (see for example, Campbell, Hughes, Hewstone & Cairns 2010; Dale & Newman 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Other theorists used the concept earlier, Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988) and Loury (1977), as cited by DeFilippis (2001). However, Robert Putnam's works (1993;

2000) are most often cited as expanding the theory (Bryson & Mowbray 2005; Mandall 2010; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Putnam's version has had a rapid rise in popularity with policy makers, academics, politicians and those working with communities (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). By researching and contrasting two regions in Italy, one prosperous and one impoverished, Putnam theorised their differences as attributed to their ability to generate 'social capital' (Geoghegan & Powell 2009; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

Social capital refers to the structure of relations, that is, social networks and the norms of trust and reciprocity that arise from them (Putnam 2000), enabling people to collectively resolve common problems and achieve common goals (Healy, 2007). Putnam places emphasis on two main concepts, firstly, "bonding social capital" which is defined as homogeneous social connections and networks built on bonds of loyalty and reciprocity, and which are good mechanisms for mobilising solidarity (2000:22). Putnam's second emphasis is on "bridging social capital", which is defined as networks better for linkage to assets external to a community, and for information dissemination (2000:22).

Putnam's version of social capital was appealing because of its ability to describe and potentially measure the "intangible" core to community life - relationships, trust, reciprocity and networks (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:83), and because it was seen as the antidote for civic disengagement (Mandell 2010). Not surprisingly, policy makers seized upon social capital's utility, promoting community as the site where responsibility for ameliorating social problems lies (Bryson & Mowbray 2005).

Two critiques of social capital are relevant to theoretical foundations conceptualising structure in communities. One involves the 'measurement' discourse, which is argued by Fine (2001), as a colonising of social theory by the field of economics. The renewed interest in community by policy makers has been welcomed, however, a significant downside includes the way in which an increasing focus has been placed on the achievement of narrowly defined outcomes within set timeframes. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue:

If we can now measure all those previously unmeasurable aspects of community work, the argument goes, community workers should be able to fit much better into established accountability structures.....the consequence of this is, that all work which

is more complex to measure, becomes marginalised as lacking credibility and ‘evidence’ for its validity (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:58).

The idea of evidence raises an important issue for community development, that is, effective ways of evaluating practice. Craig (2002) argued that the evaluation of public service programs has become a growing and contested concern. Evaluation is undertaken to know “what works”, that is, to ensure proper use of public money, and also to ascertain how to improve practice (Craig 2002). However, arising from the “new managerialism” discourse, evaluation of programs has placed emphasis on identifiable and quantifiable outputs, which do not necessarily capture the effective outcomes of community development programs (Craig 2002).

A second critique of social capital relates to the way in which it fails to recognise the way in which power operates in social contexts, providing opportunities for some communities to “get ahead”, while others can only access the kind of social capital to “get by” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:83; Taylor, Wilkinson & Cheers 2008). It does not challenge power inequities that exist between communities (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011), but promotes “feel good” connections in a world where elites still control resources in political, economic and cultural domains (Skocopl 2003, cited by Mandell 2010). DeFilippis (2008:34) refers to social capital and another well-known approach to contemporary practice, Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993), with its emphasis on inside-out development, as forms of “neo-liberal communitarianism”. With a focus on consensus-building and ‘win-win’ relations, these concepts have a core belief that society is conflict-free, thus resulting in the practice’s de-politicisation (DeFilippis 2008). However, with an analysis of inequality and stratification in society, one sees the inadequacy of such approaches.

The dimensions of structure relevant to this discussion are that social capital is a theory about a structure of relations, that is, networks. Networks are used in community development so communities can solve problems and achieve goals. Social capital places emphasis on micro-structural processes, however, has the potential to span micro and macro-structural dimensions with its bridging and linking emphases. The current social policy context for community development has embraced communitarian ideals such as those found in social capital theory. However, it was posited that these ideals are shaped by a neo-liberal agenda.

This agenda has disconnected communitarianism structurally from political and economic capital (DeFilippis 2001) and, consequently, has a limited analysis of the power communities have to attract and retain such capital from which they would benefit.

This sub-section on social capital and the previous sub-section have introduced critiques of consensus and pluralist political paradigms from a structuralist political paradigm. It has been shown that consensus and pluralist theoretical orientations still dominate today despite these structural critiques. Further discussion of structural critiques, as well as their application to community development is discussed in the next sub-section.

3.2.5 Structural Critiques and Approaches

Pluralist theories dominated the field of community work after WWII, but came under heavy criticism from the radical approach of the late 1960s and 1970s. An epoch dubbed “the time of ferment” (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003:6) saw the rise of activism and social movements across a range of disenfranchised groups worldwide, highlighting various forms of inequality in society. Popple (1995:39) argues that the main critique of pluralism from a radical perspective is that it fails to make effective theoretical and practical connections between individuals’ experiences and the changing nature of society. A range of structural critiques challenged the pluralist approaches from various political ideologies including feminism, socialism, Marxism, anarchism and a liberationist paradigm (Thorpe 1992).

The structuralist approach has an analysis of the inherent conflicts that exist in society whereby certain groups gain and hold power and influence at the expense of others (Popple & Quinney 2002). Poverty is perpetuated by economic, political, and social structures, creating an unequal distribution of resources and power throughout society and resulting in various oppressive forces and structures subordinating less powerful groups (Mullaly 2007; Popple & Quinney 2002).

It is not uncommon to find reference to community development practice being a vehicle to redress structural disadvantage in the literature (see for example, Burkett 2001; Gilchrist 2009; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Kelly & Burkett 2005; Kelly & Sewell 1988; Kenny 2011; Ledwith 2011; Weeks, Hoatson & Dixon 2003). Other authors refer to this process as

‘social transformation’, (see for example, Andrews 2007; Eade 2003), and in the USA, it is referred to as ‘radical community organizing’ (Reisch 2005). Community work from this perspective provides opportunities to challenge capitalist relations and assist those groups that it believes are oppressed to achieve gains (Popple & Quinney 2002). Further, the structuralist analysis of the 1960s and 1970s highlighted community work’s subversive potential to be both ‘in and against’ the state, in that it exposed the fundamental contradictions of state-sponsored community work, particularly the belief that local solutions could be found to structural problems (Corkey & Craig 1978).

It should be noted that the literature refers to community development as having the ability to reinforce dominant structures of oppression (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Stories of poor, ineffective, or “far from enabling” (Shaw 2003) community development practices are not uncommon, which gives rise to the argument for sound reflexive practice (Mullaly 2002). More significantly, the literature on *how* structural disadvantage is redressed methodologically through community development is not clearly articulated. A cohort of teachers and practitioners associated with the University of Queensland (Lathouras 2010) have, for the past thirty five years, together and in succession, been reflecting on these ideas. Formal research and publications from this group, however, have been limited. (See publications from this cohort, Andrews 2012; Burkett 1998; Dasgupta 1974 & 1980; Daveson 1996; Halliwell 1969; Kelly & Burkett 2005; Kelly & Sewell 1988; Owen & Westoby 2011; Westoby & Dowling 2009; Westoby & Ingamells 2011; Westoby & Owen 2009). Other literature advocating community development as a way to reduce structural disadvantage is extremely limited in its discussion of practical ways to approach this task. Ten years ago, Kenny (2002) argued that the identification of effective strategies to launch the symbolic, ideological, and micro-structural processes that challenge the ongoing subjugation that occurs in everyday life is one of the big challenges still to be met for community development. It can be argued that this is still the case today.

3.2.5.1. Critical Community Development

Ledwith (2011) provides an exception, articulating a clear example of community development within a structuralist paradigm. Ledwith’s approach was formulated through three lenses, including the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971), who first theorised the concept

of *hegemony*, as “the way that a dominant group asserts control over other social groups” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:159); Paulo Freire (1985) with his approach to critical pedagogy; and feminist theory, with critiques of these two thinkers, exposing their patriarchal assumptions and class-based analyses (Ledwith, 2011).

Ledwith (2011) draws on Freire’s (1970; 1985) transformative theory of lived reality where, through the stories of people and with relations of trust, mutuality and respect, dialogue forms the basis of praxis. Storytelling holds the potential for radical change in everyday life and is the linchpin between past experience and imagined futures (Ledwith 2011:70). Ledwith outlines a structured process of storytelling and dialogue with community groups (2011:68-71) that involve “respectful questioning”, “connected knowing”, which means profound empathy with experiences and ideas different from our own, and collective analysis about forms of power inherent to the stories. Processes of imagined “counternarratives” are then undertaken, reconstructing the original stories in new ways, so group members can explore how they can influence new directions and futures through action (Ledwith 2011:71).

This form of critical pedagogy, Ledwith (2011) argues, involves processes beginning with personal empowerment and extending to critical, collective action. It ranges from local projects to movements for change. However, Ledwith argues, collective organising in current times is faced with the resistance of a culture of individualism and a politics of consumerism (2011:108). Moreover, these are unprecedented political times (Ledwith 2011; McIntyre-Mills 2010), particularly in the wake of escalating world crises of social justice, environmental instability and the fragility of capitalism. The latter is exemplified by the 2007 banking crisis, which revealed the extent of corporate greed and inappropriate risk taking, and which led to a world recession (Ledwith 2011:1).

Reflecting on the progress of community development since her critical approach was first published in 1995, Ledwith argues:

Never has there been a more important opportunity for community development to redefine its radical agenda and to engage with injustice in the process of progressive social change (2011:2).

Furthermore, in a globalised world, shifting boundaries are occurring between state, civil society and the market (Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw & Taylor 2011), which threaten to add to the widening gaps between poverty and prosperity (Ledwith 2011). An ideology of the market and its “profit-over-people-and-planet” imperative is seeing structures of oppression implicit in this ideology now reproduced on a global scale (Ledwith 2011:1).

Community development faces two major “sticking points” that reduce its critical potential, Ledwith argues:

One is the resistance to developing theory in practice; the other is the reluctance to move beyond community to harness a greater collective force for change. Networks, campaigns and alliances offer structures to harness collective power outside community, but if these are to be successful, we need to develop theory and skills that support working across difference (2011:110).

Ledwith’s version of practice is one that aligns with structural critiques and approaches highlighting that, in a globalised world where economic and market-forces dominate, socio-political domains have lost traction. Structural inequalities persist as membership of society is constructed with the individual as consumer within a market economy (Ledwith 2011). Structural connections between individuals experiencing oppression and the causes of that oppression are not being made satisfactorily or to any great extent, and Ledwith’s approach to community development highlights the need for micro-macro structural connections. However, making such connections can be problematic, particularly if practice emphasises locality work only.

Gilchrist’s (2009) networking approach to community development has attempted to do this, providing a useful theory for thinking about ways to make structural connections and thereby creating possibilities for reducing the deleterious effects of oppression. This theory is discussed in the next sub-section.

3.2.5.2 Networking and Structural Community Development

The idea of networking is not new to community development. It is a term found in many texts (see for example, Kenny 2011; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Stepney & Popple 2008), and is considered a core process when communities and wider society are seen in terms of a complex system with patterns of connections for processing and disseminating information (Gilchrist 2009). Gilchrist refers to social capital theory (2009:6), however focuses strongly on its bridging and linking forms. Gilchrist theorises the concept of “meta-networking” (2009:73), that is, facilitating connections between networks, challenging preconceptions, creating opportunities for shared activities and encouraging dialogue across apparent boundaries. Her theory, entitled “the well-connected community”, is a way of thinking about community as the emergent property of complex and dynamic social systems, having the ability to adapt to changing organisational and political environments (Gilchrist 2009).

Gilchrist’s (2009) networking approach provides some guidance, particularly when considering patterns of connections beyond micro-structural levels. Indeed, vibrant networks can help communities function more effectively, however, as Curtis (2010) argues, it should never be assumed networks could totally compensate for material inequalities. Curtis’ emphasis brings one’s thinking back to the nub of the structuralist paradigm, which highlights inequality and poverty as having macro-level drivers causing the subordination of less powerful groups in society.

One could argue that the movement from micro-structural to macro-structural analysis and processes makes for complicated practice. Another complication arises when postmodernist social theory weighs in to debates on community development. Postmodernism created new opportunities and new emphases for practice, but also created theoretical discontinuities. These are the subject of the next section and its two sub-sections on structure and agency, and a reconceptualisation of power.

3.2.6 Postmodern Perspectives and Community Development

Postmodern theories emerged in the latter half of the 20th Century, heralding unprecedented ways of critical thinking as well as “smashing up” old certainties (Oksala 2007:1). Its theories have had a significant impact on social and political thought, particularly for those seeking alternative formulations to dominant paradigms (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). A

postmodern social theory examines the social world from multiple perspectives of class, race, gender and other identifying group affiliations and, at the same time, rejects totalising claims such as those seen in grand narratives like Marxism (Agger, 1991). Ife and Tesoriero provide a definition of postmodernism by stating:

It rejects the dominant paradigm as being the essence of the 'modern' and seeks different, non-linear models of cultural production and critique that reject conventional forms of logic and discourse.....reality can no longer be understood in terms of a single 'meta-narrative' but is characterized by multiple discourses, fragmented meanings and continual simultaneous redefinitions; to seek a single unifying and integrating model, answer or paradigm is both futile and meaningless (2006:41).

Postmodern approaches to community development respond to the diversity and heterogeneity that are part of our cultural and social experiences (Kenny 2011). Additionally, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:139) argue, postmodernism emphasises the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of multiple 'realities' in a fragmented, rather than unified, world.

Kenny (2011) and Ife and Tesoriero (2006) argue community development practice simultaneously embraces principles that are drawn from both the project of modernity and the post-modern critique of modernity. Further, post-modern thinking accepts the integrity and authenticity of ordinary people and rejects the all-knowing intellectual or the expert practitioner (Kenny 2011:104). The relevance and challenge that this type of thinking has on contemporary community development practice involves the acknowledgement that communities and societies are continually changing; an awareness that there are multiple sites of power and sources of oppression; and that struggles occur on all levels (Kenny 2011:104). The post-modern viewpoint emphasises responding to domination and control in the multiplicity of ways in which they occur and encourages a plurality of viewpoints and practices in response to these (Kenny 2011:104).

However, a negative appraisal of postmodern approaches, with its emphasis on fragmentation and multiples truths, is that they may lead people to abandon political principles, goals and strategies for a better society, thus leaving a political vacuum which can be filled by those

seeking power (Kenny 2011). Ledwith (2011) cites Fisher and Ponniah (2003), who argue that any counter-hegemony processes, such as global movements, must tread a fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, the idea of harnessing both difference and convergence.

In conclusion, the weight given to structure in the radical analysis reduced those not defined primarily in class terms as passive objects of policy, as distinct from active subjects in politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Moreover, given the emphasis on what could be seen as too much structure and not enough agency, radical community work was in danger of becoming trapped in “dichotomous rather than dialectical thinking” (Shaw & Martin 2000). Postmodern theories, with their emphasis on identity and difference, provided new theoretical perspectives for community development, particularly when power could be seen in its multiple forms, and multiple forms of agency enabled. These theories on agency and power are critical for community development and are explored in the next two sections.

3.2.6.1 Structure and Agency

Placing emphasis on the efficacy of human action, or ‘agency’ (Sewell 1992), gives rise to theories which view humans as active subjects, as opposed to passive objects of politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, discussed in the previous chapter, has been used by community development theorists, Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002), to illuminate their thinking about how people re-constitute their lives whilst being constituted by the structures of society.

Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002) focus on Giddens’ concept of “modalities” which are “cultural traditions and patterns”, a means by which structures are translated into action. Arguing that social solidarity is an aim of community development, Hustedde and Ganowicz (2002) state that modalities represent the form solidarity takes, established by people following symbolic norms and patterns available to them, and based on their cultures and traditions. A commonly used technique in community development, processes that facilitate the telling of personal stories, is an example of a modality that builds bonds between people and helps to break down feelings of isolation around matters of individual concern. The

bonds that are created through these processes are important and often lead to various collective action endeavours or collective agency.

Though a Giddens lens, it can be seen how structures shape and can be shaped by modalities (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). Community change agents are not seen as powerless when faced with powerful structures, as cultural patterns can be transformed to influence or break down structural constraints that inhibit solidarity or capacity building (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). Social movement theorists, Goodwin and Jasper, give an example of “a structure”, the state, as one of the main players with which social movements interact (2004:viii). The state, they argue, is a structure that people tend to see as a unified actor, rather than a complex web of agencies and authorities saturated with culture, emotions, and strategic interactions (Goodwin & Jasper 2004). This emphasis on nuance and culture in relation to one entity is the kind of thinking that generates agency.

Structuration theory is helpful to community development because it links macro and micro theories, or the individual and the structures of society when, through various modalities, structures and power differences are transformed (Hustedde & Ganowicz 2002). On the other hand, Goodwin and Jasper (2004) also argue that there is still much to learn about the elements of political process theory, particularly in relation to culture and emotions associated with social movements, as well as the concept of agency as seen in relation to the limits of structuralist theories.

Reconceptualising power through a postmodern lens is another of the elements helpful for increasing agency. These ideas are discussed in the next section.

3.2.6.2 Reconceptualising Power

The literature suggests, as noted earlier, that community development can provide a lens through which existing societal structures and practices can be scrutinized, in order to find more egalitarian, supportive and sustainable alternatives, or the “world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). With analyses of the root causes of inequality and oppression, and with the knowledge that structures are produced and reproduced when acted upon by agents of change, it is possible to see the emancipatory potential of community development. At the

heart of this idea is another contribution from postmodernist thought, which also enables community development's emancipatory potential, that is, the idea of reconceptualising power.

Foucault (1980) theorised power as being produced rather than owned (Oynx 1996; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Power is not situated in particular people or institutions and because it is produced and reproduced, it can be challenged (Prior 2009; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011; Taylor 2007). Moreover, the way power is used can be resisted and new forms of power produced, particularly forms of power from below (Ife 2010). Multiple forms of wisdom are valued rather than any single, unifying worldview imposed from above (Ife 2010).

However, Shaw (2007) argues, community does not exist within a political vacuum, but reflects and reinforces the dynamics of power within particular contexts and times. The Foucaultian emphasis on power provides a way of shaping those contexts, highlighting particularly that power is formed at the periphery, not the centre (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). This analysis provides a spatial dimension to power, where practice at the "localized margins" provides opportunities to see how power is exercised, made sense of, responded to and changed into new forms of power (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:4). Further, the Foucaultian emphasis on language also provides thinking about how power relations are shaped through various discourses, which are, like power, also dynamic and fluid in nature (Ife & Tesoriero 2006; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Community development has a role to make space for subjugated voices and knowledge and, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue, this type of resistance at the periphery can destabilise dominant discourses.

Power is central to thinking and working critically with communities to achieve change for social justice (Ledwith 2011; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Indeed, no development strategy can 'opt out' of the realities of power, particularly those that generate and perpetuate poverty (Berner & Phillips 2009). Postmodernist ideas help reconceptualise power to this end, as do newer ideas about power, some of which are introduced below.

Thompson and Thompson (2001) understand power as multilayered, where power is understood at personal, cultural and structural levels (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Andrews (1996) presents a similar framework to Thompson and Thompson (2001), with the

additional dimension of empowerment through community development at social, as well as personal, cultural and structural levels.

Gaventa's (2006) approach to analysing power has provided additional tools for contemporary practice (Hoggett, Mayo & Miller 2009). His 'power cube' provides a three-dimensional model, introducing a number of frameworks for imagining power. One of those frameworks, useful in terms of understanding power, involves four concepts, 'power-over', 'power-to', 'power-within', and 'power-with'. The concept in which some form of control is exercised by a person or a group of people over others is known as "power-over" (Gaventa 2006). The concept in which people develop a sense of agency is known as "power-to" (Gaventa 2006:6). The concept in which people gain a sense of confidence, a pre-condition necessary for action, is known as "power within" (Gaventa 2006:6). Finally, the concept in which people use synergistic energy, often found in collaborative partnerships, collective action and alliance building is known as "power with" (Gaventa 2006:6). Analysing power from various perspectives opens up possibilities for increasing power and, therefore, Gaventa's various frameworks provide a range of ways in which practitioners and community members can undertake power analyses and be empowered.

Structural accounts of social issues see the problems in communities lying in oppressive and inequitable social structures, an approach that can be likened to "blaming the system" (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:55). On the other hand, post-structural perspectives, which emphasise deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge and power, provide opportunities for people to shape alternative imaginings of both community "problems" and "solutions" (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:55). Therefore, whilst creating a theoretical discontinuity from what had come before, postmodernist theoretical perspectives have the potential to facilitate community development's emancipatory agenda, when options for new forms of power and agency are generated.

The dimensions of structure identified in postmodernism, structure and agency, and reconceptualising power, have highlighted three key concepts – nuance, balance and transformation. Postmodern perspectives provided thinking about heterogeneity, that is, diverse cultural patterns within society. They also highlighted multiple analyses and possibilities for responses to situations, or the need for nuance. However, fragmented meanings and continual simultaneous redefinitions can be taken too far, causing community

development to lose some of its unifying principles for a better society. This suggests the idea of balance is necessary, where practice needs to hold or straddle multiple objectives, those enabling both difference and convergence. Postmodern perspectives also provided thinking about the transformative elements of practice, particularly in relation to how people can reconceptualise power and how these have the potential for greater agency.

One of those possible transformative ideas can be seen through the lens of citizenship and democratic renewal. This is discussed in the next section and provides the final theoretical foundation for exploring the concept of structure within this historical overview.

3.2.7 Social Democratic Reform Through Citizenship

Saul Alinsky's seminal text *Rules for Radicals* (1971) called for a "reformation", the process where masses of people reach a point of disillusionment with past ways and values and then, together, organise, build power and change the system from within (Alinsky 1971:114). Discussing the importance of democracy, Alinsky (1971:115) was "desperately concerned" that masses of people, through lack of interest or opportunity, are resigned to live lives determined by others. He argued that,

The spirit of democracy is the idea of importance and worth in the individual, and faith in the kind of world where the individual can achieve as much of his (sic) potential as possible.... Separation of the people from the routine daily functions of citizenship is heartbreak in a democracy (Alinsky 1971:115).

Active citizenship can be traced back to the ancient Greek concept of *agora*, a site of political assembly, an interface between the public and private spheres of social life (Geoghegan & Powell 2009). In contemporary times, community development can be seen as an expression of "the political and politicized assembly of an active citizenry in civil society" (Geoghegan & Powell 2009). Geoghegan and Powell's definition of the practice is:

Community development is a form of politics whereby citizens participate in civil society through communicative action in order to directly socialize policy issues (Geoghegan & Powell 2009).

Civil society can be understood as one of the spheres of social activity, alongside the sphere of the state or government, and the sphere of the market or for-profit business (Kenny 2011:111). It is a sphere where citizens “come together freely and independently to discuss issues and work collectively to influence and shape their society” (Kenny 2011:128).

Varying conceptions of citizenship have been discussed in community development theory and practice over time, (see for example, Alinsky 1971; Gaventa 2001; Kenny 1997; Powell & Geoghegan 2005; Shaw & Martin 2000; Taylor 2007), and historically it has occupied a position between policy and politics, that is, formal institutions of the state and informal practices of communities (Shaw 2011).

In a discussion on the tension between “process” and “outcome” to achieve a vision, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:273) argue Alinsky’s “pragmatic” approach had an emphasis on outcomes at all costs. Alinsky (1971) emphasised an extreme approach, that the ends justifies the means (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:273). Yet, in relation to this discussion on citizenship, an alternative view of achieving a vision can be seen in the Gandhian (1964) approach, which sees process and outcome as integrated (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). Based on principles of non-violence Gandhi’s approach encompasses a theory of human liberation and social change (Reisch 2005). One of the 20th Century’s most prominent figures (Lal 2012), Gandhi’s role in India’s struggle for freedom from British rule is legendary, and arguably, epitomised citizenship. “Do or Die”, he urged Indians, in his 1942 “Quit India” movement (Lal 2009). As a practitioner of non-violent resistance, Lal (2009) argues, Gandhi displayed a “rather distinct and admirable sensibility in his articulation of care as a moral imperative”. Gandhi counselled people to engage in those struggles that were in their proximity or held the most meaning for them (Lal 2012). Yet, on the other hand, as citizens of the world one cannot be free if others are enslaved, therefore, Lal (2012) argues, contemporary struggles are ones “that we must all join”.

Shaw and Martin (2000) provide an overview of key phases of community work, identifying discourses of citizenship and the “problems” these constructions have raised. These phases include: social democracy and the problem of the inactive citizen; the structuralist critique and the problem of citizen action; marketisation and the problem of citizen as customer; and, democratic renewal and the challenge of active citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Embedded in a pluralist political ideology, the social democracy viewpoint locates citizenship in terms of self-help and citizens becoming active (Shaw & Martin 2000). An example of this was discussed earlier in relation to the CDPs in Britain. Underpinned by Marxist political thought and from the standpoint of a raised consciousness regarding various forms of exploitation and alienation, the structuralist critique views citizenship in terms of the working class and political activism (Corkey & Craig, 1978; Shaw & Martin 2000).

The market framework is constructed around the intersecting discourses of individual self-interest and self-help, private initiative, enterprise and competition, and where a transfer of activities from the state to the private sector has occurred (Kenny, 2002). Within a neo-liberal political ideology, society is viewed in terms of possessive individualism, and citizenship is viewed in terms of social entrepreneurship or consumerism (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Geoghegan and Powell (2009) argue that, in the 21st Century, the *agora* is under sustained attack from neo-liberalism, with its assumption that ‘good change’ equates with economic growth. In such a scenario, civil society is subservient to the needs of “untrammelled” economic ‘development’, and widening social inequality is an integral function of wealth creation (Powell & Geoghegan 2004:6). Power has become decentered in a globalised world dominated by “oligarchical capitalism” (where the wealth of multinational corporations frequently exceeds that of nation states) and “supranational oligarchies of power” (epitomised by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and the Group of Eight) (Powell & Geoghegan 2004:6).

With power in the hands of a relatively small number of elites, and state-led development effectively eclipsed (Powell & Geoghegan 2004), this context has given rise to the theoretical position of civil society needing to be reclaimed through the repoliticisation of citizenship (Shaw & Martin 2000). With the global restructuring of capital undermining the sovereignty of the nation state and exerting pressure to maximize profits and cut back on public expenditure, it is suggested that there is an urgent demand for new ways of thinking about democracy in a “free society”, as opposed to a “free market” (Shaw & Martin 2000).

Democracy and governance require more than just social choices made by voting within national boundaries and within limited terms, McIntyre-Mills (2010) argues. It requires processes responsive to ongoing socio-political, economic and environmental changes and the identity shifts that occur over generations (McIntyre-Mills, 2010). Progressive community development, particularly if it has an emphasis on activating ‘voice’ rather than managing diversity (Shaw & Martin 2000), can strengthen civil society by creating opportunities for the renewal of political and democratic life (Shaw 2011). Indeed, to solve our pressing ecological, economic and social concerns, reclaiming the *agora*, through community development processes that enable space for dialogue, critical thinking and imagination, seems to be one of society’s best hopes.

The dimensions of structure relevant to this discussion on democratic renewal have shown democratic society as comprising a number of ‘spheres’. Historically, citizenship, like other theoretical concepts relevant to community development, has been underpinned by varying political ideologies (Powell & Geoghegan 2005). It was argued that the current ideology, neo-liberalism, has overshadowed any that have come before. Economic structures and imperatives, including explanations for society’s problems and their solutions, have superseded other imperatives. The contemporary literature on community development and citizenship calls for a repoliticisation of citizenship, where active citizens have a voice about the kinds of societies in which they wish to live and leave for future generations. This kind of restructuring of society moves people and their concerns for health, social well-being, and ecological sustainability, from the periphery to the centre of political debates. It is suggested that community development has a pivotal role to play in this process.

Much of this historical overview is drawn from British and Australian literature, though not exclusively. With a history of colonisation by Britain, it is not surprising to see a number of traces or parallels between British practices of politics and community work, and our antipodean accounts. However, there are a number of points to be made that demonstrate the particularities of Australian community work and the social policy context within which it exists. These are discussed in the next section, providing a context for the current study.

3.3 Australian Community Work – An Overview

There is a long and rich history of Australian community work, particularly at the local level. (See for example, case study literature, Baldry & Vinson 1991; Halliwell 1969; Ingamells, Lathouras, Wiseman, Westoby & Caniglia 2010; Kelly, Morgan & Coghlan 1997; Kelly & Sewell 1986; Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992; Webster & Benger 1993; Weeks, Hoatson & Dixon 2003). Furthermore, many Australian case study examples of practice are published in the Australian community development journal, *Community Quarterly*, which was established in 1983. Now known as *New Community Quarterly* it is the only community development journal in Australia and aims to promote education regarding sustainable practices for community development, contributing to an ecologically and socially sustainable world.

Cooperatives and Friendly Societies

Community work in Australia can be traced back to the 1850s, when the first formal co-operatives and friendly societies were formed in Australia (see for example, Australian Unity 2008; Halladay 2001; Halladay & Peile 1989; Halladay, O'Connor & de Simone 1994). Prior to federation in 1901 and the establishment of social welfare policies and their associated financial payments, ordinary Australians faced with shared needs and with faith in the principle of mutual self-help, formed friendly societies. The first financial 'safety net' members made small weekly contributions to a common fund that paid benefits to members who became ill, lost work, or suffered hardship (Australian Unity 2008).

The first Australian cooperative was established in Queensland in 1859 (Cooperative Development Services 2012). Many of the older cooperatives were associated with agriculture and primary industries, for example, butter cooperatives and cotton gin cooperatives in rural Australia. Fuelled by the depression of the 1920s and 1930s and the need to survive financially or to build financial capital, people needed to cooperate. Unlike friendly societies, which have either been abandoned or de-mutualised and replaced by for-profit corporations, the cooperative movement remains a viable mechanism by which people can experience mutual self-help today (Halladay, 2001).

Australian Social Policy and the Welfare State

The powers of the federal government in social policy matters are limited to the Constitution (Jamrozik 2005). When the Constitution became law in 1901, social policy authorized the federal parliament to legislate on matters relating to “invalid and old-age pensions”, however, those provisions have now greatly increased (Jamrozik 2005:49). The concept of the welfare state takes the view that responsibility for the well-being of citizens does not, and should not lie with the individual, private entrepreneur or corporation, the family, or voluntary associations (Kenny 2011:155). The role of governments is to ensure the security and prosperity of their citizens by establishing protective structures, processes and institutions providing universal services and provisions in areas such as medical insurance, public housing, and social security (Kenny 2011).

However, the degree of universalism and residualism in government social expenditure has varied according to the philosophical perspectives of the two major political parties in Australia (Jamrozik 2005). There has been and continues to be a deep division in social philosophy between the conservative coalition of parties and the Australian Labor Party. Most advances in social legislation that have extended social provisions have occurred during times of federal Labor governments (Jamrozik 2005). Matters of the welfare state speak to the distribution of social rights in society on the principle of equality (Jamrozik 2005). Complete equality in all aspects of societal arrangements may be an unachievable objective, however, Jamrozik (2005) argues, the sustained striving towards reducing inequality through appropriate social policy demonstrates a commitment to welfare state principles. The subject of inequality is not just the purview of social policy. It can be seen as inextricably linked to social movements, which was a key feature of politics during the mid 20th Century.

The Rise of Activism and Social Reforms

The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of activism fuelled by the women’s movement, trade union activism, such as the inner city ‘green bans’ (see, Munday & Craig 1978), Aboriginal land rights, gay liberation, migrant rights and anti-Vietnam moratoria (Onyx 1996; Weeks, Hoatson and Dixon 2003). After an extended period of economic prosperity post WWII, the “combined effect of these social movements was to shock the nation’s complacency” about

injustice, poverty and oppression (Onyx 1996). The activist model is the one most clearly associated with some traditions of community development in Australia (Onyx 1996; Kenny 2011) and had its ascendancy with political and intellectual reinvigoration of the Australian Left in the 1970s (Kenny 2011), which was calling for radical social change (Ife & Tesoriero 2006).

Meekosha and Mowbray (1990) refer to the early 1970s as the period of “hope” for community development in Australia. The ferment of the 1960s had, for a few years at least, created mechanisms by which to channel its energy for reform and justice into planning and participation processes. During the term of the new federal Labor government (1972-1975) under Prime Minister Whitlam, one of these processes was resourced to provide for a national community development scheme through the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) (Kenny 2011:39). Programs funded through the AAP aimed to provide a coordinated regional approach for responding to people living in poverty (Whitlam 1972). The community development of the 1970s and early 1980s emerged as both a philosophy and as a political strategy for empowerment and social change (Onyx 1996). This period was characterised by a structural analysis, one which recognised that social structures had created inequality and disadvantage and, therefore, it was the responsibility of larger society to provide the resources to redress these (Onyx 1996).

Kelly (1980:49-50) writes about this phase of practice in Australia documenting the shift from “community work” in the 1960s to “community development” in the 1970s. This shift saw more emphasis placed on activism, where “groups sought power and were more revolutionary and reformist” in character (Kelly 1980:51).

We had a lot of different types of ‘guns’ but the establishment had more (Kelly 1980:51).

However, Kelly argues, what was missing from community development theorising at this time was “an alternative to ‘the gun’” (1980:51). This was the period during which, from a base at the University of Queensland, community development made links with the Indian sub-continent and drew from the Gandhian non-violence movement (Dasgupta 1980; Lathouras 2011). Kelly argued that the social forces required to achieve greater democracy and equity included the political, economic, legal, physical and moral. Regarding moral

forces, Kelly wrote, “The most amazing thing about non-violent moral coercion is its absolute strength” (1980:53). In terms of political forces, he declared “community development ought to test its revolutionary capacity by adherence to disciplined nonviolence” (Kelly 1980:53). This approach to community development is one synonymous with the society “we are attempting to achieve”, rather than being defined by forces of the establishment “we are attempting to rectify” (Kelly 1980:54). To this day, this philosophy and approach to practice has been sustained by academics and theorists based at the University of Queensland.

If the late 1960s and 1970s was the era of radicalism and progressive social change, the landscape in the mid 1980s took a decidedly conservative and restricted outlook with the emergence of New Right politics.

New Right Politics and Their Reforms

With the exception of some informal enclaves within particular programs such as public tenants’ organisations, Meekosha and Mowbray (1990:339) argued, there was, by the mid-1980s “no discernable radical position remaining in Australian community work”. Politically, this time in Australia’s history saw significant, far-reaching and lasting consequences, as witnessed by a worldwide trend of New Right politics and reform. This trend was led by neo-conservatives Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:5-8) but, subsequently, has been adhered to by political parties on the progressive side of politics as well. The 1980s saw the rise of the individual where citizens, within a neo-liberal framework and the market ‘logic’ birthed in this time period, were valued because they were producers or consumers (Kenny 2011).

Many of the issues that confronted welfare and community workers in the early 1980s remained through the 1990s (Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992). The New Right agenda has remained strong and, from within this paradigm, community development can be constructed as restoring family and individual responsibility, duty and obligation (Kenny 2011).

Contemporary Contexts and Practices

Jamrozik (2005) argues Australia is now considered a post-welfare state, as evidenced by the change of attitude towards social expenditure and, correspondingly, significant changes in social policy. While some measures introduced in previous periods are still in existence, they have been systematically eroded and their nature changed (Jamrozik 2005). Kenny (2011:155) concurs, naming the welfare state as “a failed promise”. It has come into disrepute since the mid-1980s because the welfare state’s promise of looking after the well-being of all its citizens has not been filled (Kenny 2011). There has been a sustained myth of egalitarianism in Australia, however its opposite is true, Jamrozik (2005) argues; Australia has always been a society of inequality – a class society.

The welfare “frame” has played a significant role in shaping work with communities in Australia, built around service provision in geographical locations across the country (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011: 55-57). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:3) argue that contemporary community work must be seen within the context of the crisis of the welfare state, one which has seen continuing cut-backs in public services, and has lowered the quality of service provision as overburdened workers are urged to “do more with less”.

While community development has always faced various dilemmas, it now faces a whole new range of complexities affecting community development practice (Kenny 2002). Kenny and her research colleagues argued that, the field of community development is in an era of “fused discourses”, where ideological influences abound and these create contexts for complex analysis in relation to practice (Brown, Kenny & Turner 2000). Furthermore, Ingamells (2006) argues, shifts in discourses have revamped the political landscape, where people are now governed, govern themselves and govern each other in new ways, requiring a new repertoire of community development strategies and techniques.

The rhetoric of marketisation dominates the funding for community work programs and has strong appeal when couched in terms of improving efficiency and productivity, and the belief that this provides better community development programs for communities (Kenny 2011). However, the realities of this logic are incompatible with community development principles of social justice and self-determination because, when community programs are commodified, disadvantaged groups become less empowered and more marginalised (Kenny 2011). With an emphasis on “new managerialism” within this frame, a competitive businesslike approach, which emphasises efficiency, productivity and risk management, is

profoundly problematic for community organisations engaging in community development (Kenny 2011:72).

There is no doubt that the current neo-liberal environment is creating many challenges for funded community development. Pearce (2010) argues whether social change can be fundable at all, given the emphasis on professionalised practice and bureaucratic processes. She argues that non-Government organisations in receipt of funding for community development are embedded in “a structural dilemma”, one where they need to make choices about their role in social change processes (Pearce 2010). The way in which organisations analyse power and position themselves as agents of change is pivotal for just change in contemporary contexts (Pearce 2010).

Furthermore, Burkett (2011) provides a hopeful response for organising within a robust neo-liberal context when she argues that resistance against hegemonic structures can take many forms. She sets out five responses, two which are less positive, and include an attitude in which people claim to be “a victim of the system” or acquiesce to the system, claiming it cannot be changed (Burkett 2011). Three more proactive responses include outright opposition, creating small-scale alternatives to the market economy, and engaging with the system to create change (Burkett 2011). The latter involves linking to and developing understandings of the market and its neo-liberal ideology in order to deliver outcomes of social justice (Burkett 2011). This is “a time of possibilities”, Burkett (2011) argues, and requires progressive practitioners to respond to current dilemmas and contexts in the spirit of idealism and creativity, and with clarity of purpose couched within a strong values base.

Ife and Tesoriero (2006:332-334) problematise the notion of community work as a profession, by asking who has access to specialised knowledge through training, and what that means for skill-sharing and empowerment processes in communities. Issues associated with paid practitioners located within the apparatus of the state and its managerialist agendas have been discussed. However, while it is not necessary for a community worker to have any formal education or training, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:332) argue that many different professionals employ a community development perspective, including community-oriented social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, nurses, lawyers and teachers. In Australia, specific vocational courses in community development are taught in vocational colleges and universities. Although the quantity varies widely, Schools of Social Work at

Australian universities are required to include some community work education, this being a standard of social work's professional body (Australian Association of Social Work 2008:11).

Taking stock of contemporary Australian community development education and practice, *New Community Quarterly's* editor laments the lack of "official" support for the practice, and its minimal representation in social work and other curricula, particularly in relation to societal-structural impediments to realise the practice's ideals (Boulet 2010). However, in a more optimistic vein, Boulet (2010) also refers to a thriving and growing "alternative" sphere, in areas such as co-housing, peace and non-violence work, permaculture, and social enterprises. Burkett (2008) also discusses the trend to re-localisation in Australia, as seen in the Transition Town movement. Other neighbourhood-based initiatives are seen associated with neighbourhood houses and learning centres (see for example, Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Centres Association 2011; Caniglia & Trotman, 2011; West End Community House 2011).

The Australian political context is full of inconsistency. For example, on one hand, we have a political context that allowed for the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's historic 2007 apology to the Stolen Generations. This apology was directed to Indigenous Australians who were on the receiving end of successive governments' policies, which led to a significant gap in health, education and housing standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. On the other hand, at the same time, the federal government introduced the Northern Territory "Emergency Response" intervention to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse and family violence (Australian Government 2007). This policy was critiqued as needing substantial change for the measures to be consistent with Australia's international human rights obligations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007). Currently, the Australian Government has plans to further extend the policy's powers. Activist groups working for justice, rights and reconciliation argue these reforms will further undermine the human rights of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (see for example, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation 2012).

Community development in Australia, also, continues to be full of paradox and contestation (Kenny 2011). In a context of such contestation, gaining collective analyses about the political context and other aspects of practice seems imperative. Meekosha and Mowbray

(1995) argued there is little prospect for collective resistance, because Australian community work is divided, organisationally and politically. Dixon, Hoatson and Weeks (2003) argue those interested in this field do not readily get the opportunity to hear or share stories of practice, nor reflect and analyse together about the effectiveness of their practice. This type of practice-reflection is essential in the education of practitioners, as well as being the best basis for building new practice theory (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003; Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

In conclusion, historical accounts of Australian community development are similar to those found in other post-industrialised countries. Australia's colonial background may have created a particularly strong pioneering and labour-oriented ethic. However, in the latter quarter of the 20th Century, global political trends have affected Australian governments and their governance strategies as they have elsewhere. The predominant sphere for funded community work is found in local government and social and human service settings; however, this is couched within a welfare frame, which is driven by neo-liberal ideology. The country's track record for dealing with human rights issues and matters of justice has been particularly shameful, attested to by cyclic patterns of progressive politics and reform followed by conservative backlash and reform. Although there is a reasonable body of practice literature about community development, it pales into insignificance compared with other bodies of literature, such as social work practice and research. Furthermore, the literature often relates to localised practice and case study stories, and does not necessarily make strong connections to political dimensions of practice or to theorising.

3.4 Summarising the Concept of 'Structure' and the Community Development Literature

Chapter Two commenced with Lefebvre's (2002) discussion of "structure", which he argued has been highly elaborated. It has been shown that structure is a somewhat ubiquitous term used within a range of perspectives across the natural sciences, social sciences, philosophy and discipline-specific fields. Furthermore, Lefebvre (2002) argued that the broad applicability of the term results in confusion about its meaning and usage.

Foundational sociological theories - macro and micro-level theories, and theories that attempt to bridge or connect the two levels were also explored in Chapter Two. Macrosociological theories look at large-scale patterns in society and include ideas associated with politics, economics, and how people are structurally located, for example, their class. The concept of structure from this perspective is that it is imposed or has primacy over the individual. Macrosociological theories also relate to ideas about power differentials in society where structure is conceived as a struggle for power. Microsociological theories look at small-scale social interactions or patterns of behaviour between people, and also how people make meaning or interpret their social world. From this perspective, the concept of structure is seen as a metaphor, where people interpret concepts and make sense of those interpretations individually or collectively.

Critiques of both macro and micro-level theories relate to their binary nature. Binary logic is the type of social logic that views two factors as separate, mutually inconsistent or contradictory (Kelly & Sewell 1988). For example, macro theories have been accused of determinism or essentialism because they cannot explain the diversity that exists within people's lives (Bottero 2010). In a similar fashion, micro theories are critiqued because they ignore the larger issues of power and structure within society and how these serve to constrain individual action (Giddens 2009).

Theorists attempting to bridge the macro-micro dilemma call for a more dialectic type of logic (Ritzer 2011). Dialectic logic is "a logic of dialogue" between two factors, that is, a logic that appreciates interrelationships between factors, including those that are harmonious and those that are contradictory (Kelly & Sewell 1988:17). Social theories that attempt to bridge these binary positions explore both objective and subjective ontological positions. They provide debates concerning human action and social structure and the extent to which consensus and conflict are considered factors within the social world (Giddens 2009).

These types of theorising are mirrored in the community development literature. This chapter provided a historical account of the various theoretical epochs within community development. Importantly, how one understands the purpose of community development influences how various theoretical positions are privileged or restricted. For example, with consensus theories, the purpose of community development emphasises personal transformation without necessarily considering broader structural social change. This

compares with pluralist and structuralist theories located at the macro-level. These also sit within conflict theories, that is, with an analysis of inequality. From this perspective, the purpose of community development is, to varying degrees, broader structural change to redress inequality. Specific theories attempting to bridge micro-macro levels are those that connect local projects with broader social movements (Ledwith 2011), and also include theories such as bridging social capital and meta-networking (Gilchrist 2009).

Postmodernist theories, as they relate to community development, provided perspectives with a greater dialectical prospect, and occur when one thinks about how power is produced and reproduced in communities. A greater dialectical prospect also occurs when one thinks about the diversity of participants in community development, how multiple ‘truths’ exist amongst people, and also how agency is created or increased from these standpoints. Totalizing or grand narratives, and how social positioning is determined, are destabilised when adopting perspectives from a postmodern theoretical position. However, it is fair to say that these perspectives could be applied to any articulation of community development’s purpose. The discussion focused on concepts such as nuance, balance and transformation, and these concepts are readily applicable to practice with differing aims. Hence, the discussion provided a salient warning not to abandon political principles, goals and strategies to achieve a better society (Kenny 2011). Ledwith (2011), arguing from a critical theoretical perspective, claims that community development’s purpose is best served by treading a fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, one that has an emancipatory agenda.

Many parallels over time could be drawn between the community development literature and other bodies of literature regarding the concept of structure. Significantly, Mills’ (1959/2010:7) “sociological imagination”, a concept that looks for relationships between micro-level *personal troubles* and macro-level *public issues*, sits very comfortably with community development practice. A number of theorists in the discussion referred to community development practice as a creative act. From this perspective, it is a practice that considers the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions (Popple & Quinney 2002), through a process of “imagined futures” (Ledwith 2011:70). This is to create “the world as it could be” (Shaw 2007). This kind of imagination and constructionism posits a proactive view of people who struggle for and create meaning via action in the world (Parton & O’Byrne 2000:173). That is not to say that *every* construction is equally valid.

However, in the dialectic conversation, possibilities are explored, providing a bridge between the objective and subjective, or the real and the constructed (Parton & O’Byrne 2000). Therefore, dialectical spaces established through community development process-work can be described as sites for both creativity and pro-activity.

3.5 Implications for this Research

This literature review has made explicit issues concerning the theory-practice divide for structural community development. The community development field has a body of theoretical literature readily available to it. However, empirical studies that have theorised an effective approach remain limited. Kenny (2002) argued that one of the big challenges still to be met for community development was the identification of effective strategies to launch the symbolic, ideological, and *micro-structural* processes that challenge the ongoing subjugation that occurs in everyday life. Discussed earlier in this chapter, Ledwith (2011:110) argues a reluctance to theorising from practice is one of the “sticking points” facing contemporary practice, and is reducing community development’s critical potential.

Writing most recently in the Australian context, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue the critical importance of practitioners’ knowing that their practice is making a difference. Despite four decades of concerted work with communities across Australia (since the field was identifiable in social policy contexts), very little is known about what actually works (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). They argue, “If we do not begin to build a body of knowledge about working with communities, we are doomed to repeat our practice of trial and error indefinitely” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:98). Indeed, the opening discussion in their book on critical perspectives of community practice states,

Like other practitioners and academics, we have been shocked and frustrated at the lack of Australian *published* ideas, thoughts and practice wisdom about working with communities” (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:2, their emphasis).

Ife (2010) argues the relationship between theory and practice is both problematic and complex, where the two can be seen as binary opposites, that is, where one is either a theoretician or a practitioner. He claims that theory and practice cannot be understood

separately as they are part of each other; therefore, practice divorced from theory leads to an “unthinking anti-intellectualism”, where the practitioner does not ask ‘what’ or ‘why’, but only ‘how’ (Ife 2010:208). Such practice, Ife (2010) argues, is potentially dangerous and counter-productive. On the other hand, to privilege knowledge from experts, who use complex language to talk about ideas, is to marginalize the wisdom of the community (Ife 2010). Moreover, practice needs to be grounded in theory, and theorising involves searching for more than what might seem like “common sense” or “common knowledge” (Ife 2010:209). It also means searching for the “uncommon sense” and “uncommon knowledge” (Ife 2010:209). This kind of theorising, Ife (2010) argues, expands our worldview and helps us ask new questions and seeks new answers, where theory is built up from critical engagement with lived experience.

This study attempts to make some progress towards rectifying the enduring theory-practice divide for structural community development. To a degree, the literature has provided what is normative about structural implications for community development. The term normative refers to what one *should* do in a given situation (Banks & Williams 2005; Mikkelsen 2005). However, what is needed is a contribution to the literature in-situ, that is, in the place where practice occurs. This constructivist idea, about what *could* happen (Mikkelsen 2005), aims to see how practitioners are making sense of a theory of structure. Therefore, the aim of this study is to construct a theory ‘from below’ about structure and community development.

The following chapter justifies and describes the methodological approach taken in this study. It discusses that an iterative theory-building process has been undertaken throughout this study. This has involved distilling normative theoretical ideas about structure from the literature in Chapters Two and Three, and subsequent theory-building from below, based on both empirical and constructivist frames of reference reported in the data analysis chapters. A conceptual framework is needed that enables the theory-building aim of this study. A research project’s conceptual framework is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that support and inform one’s research (Maxwell 2005). The following section outlines the conceptual framework employed throughout this study.

3.5.1 Conceptual Framework

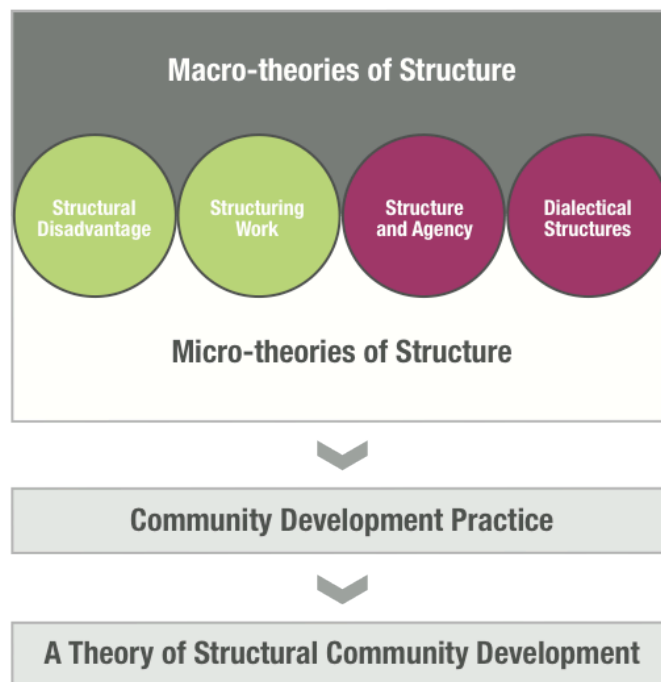
Maxwell (2005:33) describes a conceptual framework as a “tentative theory”, or in other words, what one thinks is going on in the area one intends to investigate. The purpose of the tentative theory is to inform the study’s design, to assess and refine goals, to develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats to the study’s conclusions (Maxwell 2005:33-34).

Marshall and Rossman (2011), citing Schram (2006:63), argue that the task of designing a conceptual framework involves “uncovering what is relevant and what is problematic among the ideas circulating around the problem, making new connections, and then formulating an argument that positions one to address that problem”. Subsequently, this process leads to the research design, which describes how the study will be conducted and showcases the writer’s ability to conduct the study (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

The research design section for this study is discussed in the following chapter. In that chapter, the epistemological approach taken in this study is justified. The literature review highlighted the contested and fragmented understandings of concepts of structure and issues of practice redressing inequality. Hence, this study warrants a hybrid of two underpinning epistemological paradigms. It draws from a social constructionist approach to knowledge generation, and this knowledge is viewed through a critical theory lens. These theoretical standpoints are discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Methodology.

Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study encompasses both constructivist and critical theoretical positions and can be located within broader macrosociological and microsociological theorising. See diagram below, (Figure 1), the conceptual framework for this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework diagram shows there are *six elements* inherent within the framework. The first two elements include: *macro-theories of structure* and *micro-theories of structure*. These theories have been discussed in Chapter Two, and this chapter has shown that community development theory can be located at either or both macro and micro levels of society.

The second set of elements includes theories well known to the community development literature: the *theory of structural disadvantage* and theories for methods and approaches to '*structuring*' the work of community development. Structural disadvantage has been discussed in this chapter in relation to critical and structural theories of community development. Methods and approaches to community development have also been discussed in this chapter. However, it has been argued that when making linkages between micro and macro levels community development theories are lesser known.

Thirdly, there are two other pertinent elements. These have not featured prominently in the community development literature, but are found in sociological and political science literatures. They include: *the theories of structure and agency* and theories concerning

dialectical structures. Both these perspectives can be beneficial to community development, particularly because dialectical structures are those that invite deliberation and create agency.

The application of these six theoretical lenses to community development practice aligns with the epistemological positioning of this study, one that holds both a critical theoretical perspective and a social constructionist perspective. Viewing practice through this framework will enable the researcher to meet the study's overall aim, that is, to construct a theory of structural community development.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a historical overview of community development literature and made links to the concept 'structure' as seen in sociological literature. With a critical reading of historical perspectives, it has been shown that various epochs of theory and practice have been driven by ideology across the political spectrum and this has created both theoretical continuities and discontinuities over time. Australian community work, the context for this study, mirrors the complexity of theoretical positions seen in other post-industrialised countries. It is argued that a theory-practice divide exists in relation to micro-structural aspects of community development. In addition, little literature exists about the ways in which practitioners understand and theorise these concepts. Community development has not fully integrated diverse thinking about structure into its praxis. Therefore, these important topics warrant investigation. The next chapter outlines the methodological approach for the study to enable links between the theoretical understandings of structure in the literature and practitioners' understandings of structure in their community development work.

CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology for Exploring Structural Community Development

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach taken in the study. It describes the research processes used to develop links between the theoretical understandings of structure in the literature, and practitioners' understandings of these or other theoretical understandings that have a bearing on practitioners' work.

The next section of this chapter discusses the epistemological approach taken in the study and restates the research questions in relation to these epistemological positions. The third section of this chapter locates the study within a tradition of social research, namely, practitioner research (Fox, Martin & Green 2007). The fourth section outlines the research design, justifying a two-staged process. The fifth section details the methods that were used in the study and the sixth section discusses the particular form used in the data analysis, that is, the way in which the results of the analysis are developed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The seventh and final section discusses the limitations of the research design and methods.

4.2 Epistemological Approach

In Chapter Three, arguments were put about the contested nature of community development practice and the issues that existed because of a theory-practice divide regarding the concept 'structure'. Contestation exists because of the various and fragmented theoretical underpinnings, the various policy contexts and practice approaches, and the language that is embedded in and surrounds community development practice. How community development practitioners interpret or make sense of this contestation should be examined. Therefore, the use of a qualitative research approach to this study is justified, as it locates the participant as expert, based on their experience in the real world and their interpretations and understanding of concepts.

Moreover, from where I sit as a researcher and past practitioner, community development is a practice that has an emancipatory agenda. Research that enables the emancipatory agenda of community development is useful and entirely worthwhile.

The two assumptions introduced above, the contested and fragmented understandings of concepts of structure and issues of practice redressing inequality, feed into a hybrid of two epistemological paradigms underpinning this study. The study takes a social constructionist approach to knowledge generation, however the knowledge generated can be viewed through a critical theory lens.

The first paradigm, a constructionist orientation, assumes people construct reality out of their interactions and beliefs (Neuman 2011:102). Therefore, because different practitioners interpret the concepts surrounding structure and practice differently, it is acknowledged that multiple realities exist for practitioners and these need to be investigated. Secondly, community development can be seen as problematic because some versions or constructions of it lack critical analysis. Research from a critical social science perspective aims not to just study the social world but to change it (Neuman 2011:108).

The critical research paradigm, Neuman (2011:109) argues, seeks to “critique and transform social relations by revealing the underlying sources of social relations, and to empower people, especially less powerful people”. Like some forms of community development, with their emphasis on root causes of oppression, critical approaches to research not only look at the surface level, or the observable empirical layer of social reality, but how that observable reality is generated. These realities, Neuman explains, are generated by structures and causal mechanisms that operate at deeper, unobservable layers (2011:109). Moreover, the critical social science paradigm states that, although subjective meaning is important, there are real, objective conditions that shape social relations (Neuman 2011:110). The critical researcher probes social situations and places them in a larger historical context (Neuman 2011:110), where the nature of social relations has changed over time.

Creswell (2003:9) places critical theory alongside other theoretical perspectives, such as feminist perspectives, radicalised discourses, queer theory and disability inquiry, and labels this knowledge-making as “advocacy / participatory” research approaches. Creswell (2003) argues that, historically, the advocacy/participatory (or emancipatory) writers have drawn on

the works of Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas and Freire, and more contemporary theorists (see for example, Fay 1987; Heron & Reason 1997). These writers have, in the main, proposed that the constructivist stance did not go far enough in advocating for an action agenda to help marginalised peoples. This type of research inquiry has a political agenda, and needs to contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which people work or live and the researcher's life (Creswell 2003). Moreover, this type of research assumes that the inquirer will proceed collaboratively, where participants will help with the research design and analysis, and provide a vehicle for a united "voice" for reform and change (Creswell 2003).

In order to hold both of these epistemological perspectives together, a methodology was needed that would achieve two purposes – research processes for meaning making, and processes for critical reflection and praxis. Processes for meaning-making involved undertaking in-depth interviews with practitioners and the analysis of those interviews. Processes to develop collective critical analysis and action, or praxis, occurred through group meetings with previously interviewed practitioners. Praxis can be described as "critical thinking and dialogue".... "that seek(s) to challenge conventional explanations of everyday life while, at the same time, considering the action necessary for the transformation of oppressive conditions" (Popple & Quinney 2002). Neuman's definition of praxis is "a way to evaluate explanations...in which theoretical explanations are put into real-life practice and the outcome used to refine explanation" (Neuman 2011:133). A number of community development theorists argue that acknowledging the dialogical emphasis of praxis is an appropriate approach when theorising practice (Dixon, Hoatson & Weeks 2003; Ife & Tesoriero 2006; McIntyre 1996; Mikkelsen 2005; Popple & Quinney 2002). Therefore, the dialogical group processes with practitioners (known as "Stage Two") became an important component for the theory building exercise.

Linking the theoretical foundations of structure within community development and other literatures and the actual practice of community development to gain understanding about social reality and its structural dimensions is the topic area of this study. Eliciting data to gain these insights comprised five key research questions:

1. How do practitioners think about structure in their work?

2. How do practitioners put this understanding (about structure and CD) into practice?
3. What frameworks for practice emerged from the data?
4. What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?
5. What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

These research questions, particularly questions 1-3, clearly demonstrate the social constructionist paradigm underpinning them. However, at interview, not just *any* questions were asked about community development practice. With a critical lens, the kinds of questions asked in the semi-structured interviews reflected a critical social science paradigm, particularly when focusing on community development as a practice to redress structural disadvantage. For example, one of the questions at interview included, "What role do you see community development having in relation to disadvantaged people?" Likewise, a critical stance was reflected in the analysis seeking more effective practice outcomes in order to develop a *useful* theory of structural community development. This stance is particularly evident in research questions 4 and 5.

Because structural dimensions of community development are many, and because practitioners are required to interpret meaning as they engage with their world, investigation into these phenomena necessitated the use of a qualitative methodology to find answers to the research questions posed (Marshall & Rossman 2011:2-3). The knowledge base, regarding a structural approach to community development, is drawn from practitioners in their contexts. Therefore, this research can be located with the tradition of social research known as practitioner research, discussed in the next section.

4.3 A Practitioner Research Study

McLeod (1999) defines practitioner research as research carried out by practitioners for the purposes of advancing their own practice. Thus, this study can be characterised as

‘practitioner research’. In Chapter One a personal narrative told the story of my community development practitioner experience prior to commencing this study. Fox, Martin and Green (2007) argue practitioner research is fundamentally no different to other forms of research that are about generating new knowledge. However, practitioner researchers are different as a result of their unique position in the research process.

Practitioner research provides a vehicle for practitioners to examine their practice and challenge the assumptions on which that practice is constructed....The practitioner researcher thinks about practice and research from a position that is different to academic researchers (Fox et al. 2007:197).

Neuman concurs, arguing that social science research is not just for “college classrooms and professors” (2011:1), but a range of professionals and others who apply various scientific methods to improve our understanding of the social world, and its operation. Such practitioners might be used to help solve problems or to expand future knowledge and understanding (Neuman 2011:16).

Practitioner researchers discuss practice knowledge as it relates to research. Fox et al., (2007) argue that practitioners draw on four forms of professional knowledge in practice – propositional knowledge, based on theory and research that guides practice; process knowledge, which includes skills that enable the practice to occur and be effective; personal knowledge, which draws on previous practice experience; and value-based knowledge, which relates to the moral and ethical values and beliefs one holds (Fox et al. 2007:26).

Just as experienced practitioners draw on these forms of knowledge in practice, practitioner researchers, undertaking research into practice, also use these different forms of knowledge when developing research proposals (Fox et al. 2007). However, when thinking critically about theory and practice, Fox et al. (2007) argue that practitioner researchers should be prepared to place themselves *outside* practice in order to understand the propositional knowledge driving practice within the research field. In addition, practitioner researchers should seek the support of a research supervisor who will challenge their understanding of practice throughout the research process (Fox et al. 2007).

Darlington and Scott (2002:5) highlight certain difficulties associated with practice and research, referring to “the research-practitioner split”. Discussing qualitative research in human service practice contexts, they argue that the world of research and the world of practice have remained fairly separate, where propositions about practice issues have been located in the realm of tacit knowledge, those derived from experience (Darlington & Scott 2002). Practitioners are often intimidated and alienated by the very notion of ‘research’, they argue, particularly because of its association with objective science. Practitioners may view objective science as incompatible with subjective concepts associated with practice, that is, the messiness of practice contexts involving people (Darlington & Scott 2002: 4-5). However, bridging the gap between theory and practice is the aim of Darlington and Scott’s text (a piece of research in its own right). This work highlights how practice research can improve practice, be influential at a program level or even impact politically, depending on the context and the way findings are disseminated.

Alston and Bowles (2003), discussing research in the social work field, argue that all research should lead to change at some level, whether in deepened theoretical understanding, or in the world of policy and practice. Scanlon (2000) concurs, arguing the purpose of practitioner research is to make a contribution to a particular discipline, or to address a particular practice problem, or to inform policy.

Mikkelsen (2005), an author of participatory development studies, suggests a framework for knowledge formulation which is useful. The framework seeks knowledge with an empirical frame of reference, by asking ‘what *is* happening’; a constructionist frame of reference, by asking ‘what *could* happen’; and a normative frame of reference, by asking ‘what *should* happen or *ought* to happen’ (Mikkelsen 2005:127). This framework applies to this study, in the sense that the in-depth interviews elicited from practitioners provided information about ‘what is happening in practice’, from their own perspectives. The group meeting processes elicited ‘what could happen’, when practitioners reflected on the key elements of structural community development practice, theorising together about opportunities and overcoming constraints. The third part of Mikkelsen’s (2005) framework, what should or ought to happen, is discussed in the discussion / conclusion chapter, where propositions are made about a theory of structural community development.

Maxwell (2005:15), discussing research more generally, argues that researchers need to have a clear understanding of the “goals” of their research. He defines goals as “motives, desires and purposes”, across “personal”, “practical” and “intellectual (or scholarly)” domains (Maxwell 2005:16). Having clear goals is important because they shape decisions about the research design, they determine how interpretations and theories are created, and they ensure researchers do not spend undue effort doing things that do not advance those goals (Maxwell 2005).

From my stance as a practitioner, the goals of this study are about improving community development practice in two ways. In a practical sense, the research relates to how structural community development practice may better achieve its goals. In an intellectual sense, the research seeks to discover empirical evidence about how practitioners re-theorise the various propositions found in the theoretical literature about structural practice, as well as theorise new approaches to practice. The research design overview is presented in the next section, and highlights the processes used to achieve these goals.

4.4 Research Design Overview

To support the qualitative, practitioner-led nature of this research, processes to support inductive reasoning were employed. An iterative (Patton 2002) and inductive approach was used from the literature review, through to data collection and analysis, to the writing of the thesis. Iterative refers to an approach in which each step of the research, from beginning to end, has informed the development of the next step, but has also related back to the previous step. Inductive reasoning is an approach to developing or confirming theory that begins with concrete empirical evidence and works towards more abstract concepts and theoretical relationships (Neuman 2011:70).

The study employed a two-staged research process, which involved in-depth semi-structured interviews and consensus conference processes. These are introduced here, but discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The first stage involved the completion of twenty-two in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello et al. 2008:51) with community development practitioners in two Australian

states. The goal of these interviews was to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of ‘structure’.

The second stage employed a cooperative knowledge-building exercise known as consensus conferences (Minichiello et al. 2008:161). Consensus conferences are workshops or discussion groups where participants are brought together in order to come to consensus after interaction, debate and further discussion. Jones and Hunter (1995), and McNeil (2000), state that this method is often used with practitioners from a particular field who are trying to make decisions in situations where there is either insufficient information, or where there is an overload of (often contradictory) information. This process is also used by large organisations that are attempting to set policy or a forward direction for their workforce. For example, it is used by the United Nations (Kaufmann 1980); and large religious bodies such as the Uniting Church in Australia for their annual state Synod Council conferences and their triennial national Assembly Council conferences (Tabart 2003).

Two groups were held with practitioners who had previously been interviewed during Stage One. These practitioners explored the fourth research question, and engaged in the construction of what a theory of structural community development *could* be (Mikkelsen 2005).

The aim of using the consensus conference group method in this study was to determine the extent to which practitioners, whom Sniderman (1999) considers as “experts”, agreed about particular issues. The consensus conference processes gained agreement about salient issues and concepts, and also gained agreement on matters in which there were dissenting or divergent views. For example, the group did not agree about particular factors that are drivers for community change processes, as individual participants had different experiences about these particular phenomena. If there was not full consensus in the first instance, the process sought to reach agreement about divergent opinions on the subject matter, thereby capturing the breadth and depth of opinion on the issues being considered.

Towards the end of both group meetings, a nominal group technique (Minichiello et al. 2008:160) was used to assist in data formulation, and to answer the fourth research question. A nominal group technique is a structured (Fontana & Frey 2000:651) and controlled process, where participants are asked to rank ideas in terms of importance (Minichiello et al.

2008:160). It assists in capturing a range of opinions and also gives all participants equal opportunity to provide input.

In summary, this research has employed an iterative and inductive approach to knowledge-building. In the process of dialogue between participants and myself, new understandings of structure and community development practice were distilled.

4.5 The Methods

This section discusses the specific research processes that were undertaken throughout the study. It is presented as a series of sub-sections, including:

- Criteria for choosing participants;
- Sampling processes;
- Description of the sample;
- Gaining consent to participate;
- Conducting Stage One interviews;
- Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference groups;
- Ethical issues;
- Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data.

4.5.1 Criteria for Choosing Participants

Participants were selected against a range of specific criteria. The two criteria considered essential for all participants were, firstly, that they were currently working in the field of community development and, secondly, that they needed to have had three or more years experience as community development practitioners.

These criteria were considered essential, as the “key informants” (O’Leary 2005:83) of this study, considered as experts or insiders, needed to have current knowledge of the field. There was also an assumption that the type of work being researched required a range of skill

and practice experience, not necessarily held by ‘beginning’ practitioners; hence the stipulation of three or more years experience.

In addition to these essential criteria, it was considered important that participants were drawn from urban, regional and rural contexts. This is known as a “stratified sample” (Neuman 2011:256), which offers the greatest variety of perspective across a finite group of participants. Specific quotas for participant numbers were sought from each of these three categories in the following proportion. Ideally, half the number of participants would be drawn from urban contexts and the other half would be drawn from regional or rural contexts. This was justified because of the likelihood that regional and rural practitioners would employ different practice approaches. For example, due to the lack of access to services readily available in urban areas, out of necessity, regional infrastructure is built as part of community development practice.

Other areas of diversity in the sample were also sought, although quotas were not applied. Firstly, participants would be employed by both Non-Government agencies and Government agencies. Secondly, participants would represent a mix of fields or contexts, for example, neighbourhood or local work contexts; regional or peak body work; or specialised work contexts, such as micro-finance or working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The summary table below (Table 1) details the criteria for choosing participants in the study.

Table 1: Criteria for Choosing Participants

Criteria for Choosing Participants		
Priority	Criteria Detail	Quotas Sought
Essential	Current workers in the CD field	All participants
	Three or more years of practice experience	
Important	Urban	10
	Regional and Rural	10
Desired	Diverse fields of employment and diverse employers, eg. Non-government or Government	As available

While this sample does not exhaustively represent all community development practitioners, as much diversity as possible, using these criteria, was sought to make up the sample.

4.5.2 Sampling Processes to find Participants

The first stage of the research involved recruiting and selecting participants. A range of sampling processes was used including Purposive, Convenience and Snowballing techniques.

Purposive sampling is used in exploratory research to select cases with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman 2011). It is “a nonrandom sample in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population” (Neuman 2011:268).

From the outset, it was decided that participants would be recruited from two Australian states, Queensland and Victoria. Recruiting from these particular states is an example of purposive sampling (Mason 2002) and was justified for the following reasons.

Each state has multiple ‘traditions’ (Westoby & Hope-Simpson 2010) of community development practice approaches and therefore different nuances of practice. For example, a

very specific approach to structural community development practice has been taught at the University of Queensland for the past 35 years and has been pivotal in the education of many Queensland practitioners. In contrast, a number of prominent Australian community development theorists are located in Victoria¹. These theorists have had a sustained radical power analysis and critique, which have been pivotal in the education of Victorian practitioners.

Both states have annual or bi-annual community development conferences, providing opportunities for practitioners to gain professional development and to develop some collective practice analysis. Additionally, the history of funding for community development is different in each state and these realities have generated differing approaches to development work.

The marked contrast between practice approaches in the two states underpinned their choice for recruitment to achieve a broad range of data. Focusing the sample within two distinct geographical areas also assisted with the practical implications for the Stage Two consensus conference groups. One group was held in each state. It was deemed more likely that participants would be able to attend a group if one was held in their geographic region. The use of teleconference facilities was used at the Queensland meeting to ensure those who wished to participate could do so without travelling great distances.

The participants were recruited in three ways. The first of these was by disseminating information through community development network email lists. Contact was made with the email list managers of the networks requesting their support to disseminate information about the study. These included the following formal networks: Borderlands Co-operative Inc.; the International Association of Community Development (Victorian Branch); the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres Inc. (ANHLC); the Community Centres and Family Support Network of Queensland Inc. (CCFSNAQ); and the Community Development Queensland (CD QLD) Network. A semi-formal network, the Western Suburbs Community Development Network (of Melbourne), was also used.

¹ For example, Sue Kenny (Deakin University); Martin Mowbray (RMIT University)

The responses to recruitment in Victoria were initially poor. At the time of recruitment, the 2009 Victorian “Black Saturday” bushfires had just occurred and anecdotal feedback indicated that many practitioners were preoccupied with community responses to the bush fires. This unexpected set of circumstances led to two other sampling techniques being used, that is, convenience sampling and snowballing sampling.

“Convenience” sampling (Bowers, House & Owens 2011:56) refers to recruiting cases in any manner that is convenient. Serendipitously, editions of the *New Community Quarterly* journal and the ANHLC newsletter were being disseminated during the recruitment phase of the study. Recruitment flyers advertising the research project were inserted into these publications. This strategy potentially exposed the research to people outside of the community development field. As a result, when people responded to the advertising, they were vetted and selected for participation using the same criteria as for those who responded to the community development networks’ email advertising.

Finally, because the email, flyer inserts and newsletter methods of dissemination had not elicited a response from any rural practitioners in Victoria, a “snowballing” technique (Bowers, House & Owens 2011:57-58) was employed. Snowball sampling is a method of sampling or selecting cases in a network or chain of people (Marshall & Rossman 2011; Neuman 2011). It employs a multistage technique (Neuman 2011), which identifies cases of interest from people who know people who may be information-rich (Marshall & Rossman 2011). The analogy of a snowball is used to describe this technique because a snowball may start out small in size but becomes larger as it rolls on wet snow and picks up additional snow (Neuman 2011). A Victorian practitioner in a regional community development role, who had already agreed to participate in the study, emailed rural Victorian practitioners with whom she had a relationship, drawing their attention to the research study advertising. Two rural participants in Victoria were recruited in this way.

Once potential participants responded to the advertising, they were telephoned. An “intake” form was used to record responses to demographic information including: name, CD practitioner job title; nature of their work; employing agency; years of experience; working in a paid or voluntary capacity; geographic location; highest qualification in their field; interest in being interviewed; contact details and how they heard about the research.

The responses for participation in Queensland outnumbered the responses in Victoria. All participants who responded and met the selection criteria in Victoria were interviewed. A small number of Queensland practitioners who had met the selection criteria and had shown an interest in the study were not interviewed. These people were dropped as potential participants as quotas were filled. A ‘first in’ selection process was used. That is, if they met the selection criteria, they were interviewed but if they responded after quotas were filled, they were not interviewed.

4.5.3 Description of the Sample

Interviews were conducted with twenty-two participants, of whom seven were men and fifteen were women. Two participants were from refugee backgrounds and one was an Indigenous Australian. The remaining participants were from European and Anglo-Celtic backgrounds.

The original target was for ten Queenslanders and ten Victorians to be interviewed from a spread of urban, regional and rural contexts. Two Victorian rural practitioners were recruited last, after employing the snow-balling technique. Thus interviews took place with ten Queenslanders and twelve Victorians, a total of twenty-two participants. The targeted quota of half the participants from regional or rural areas was not attained. Of the twenty-two, fifteen participants were from urban settings working in Brisbane or Melbourne, four were from regional settings and three were from rural settings.

A pre-requisite to participate in this study was a minimum of three years community development practice experience. The majority of participants had significant years of experience, with some having practiced for forty years. The median number of practice years of this sample was 13.5 years.

Most participants had either an employment contract with the job title “CD worker” or a similar job title requiring them to employ community development practice approaches in their work. Three practitioners, one Victorian and two Queenslanders, were working in a voluntary capacity. However, these people were all associated with community service

agencies or other community development entities, which provided them with formal support in their roles.

A number of factors about the participants and their community development context were recorded. They included:

1. Their state (Queensland or Victoria), and their gender (male or female);
2. Contexts of practice:
 - Location of practice – urban, regional or rural.
 - Work in the context of ‘place’, such as work within a geographical community. This included: a local community (suburbs or towns) or a number of local communities across a region; work from a local government authority base, or an organisation such as a peak body or University; or work across a regional network of other CD practitioners or neighbourhood houses.
 - Various ‘communities of interest’, such as: Sudanese Australians from refugee backgrounds; migrants; aging community members and seniors groups; young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
 - Various ‘issue-specific’ contexts, such as community housing or working with people at risk of ill health.
 - Employing agency – Government or non-Government.
3. Years of practice experience.

A total of twenty-two community development practitioners, working in different types of contexts, were interviewed. The following table provides information about their practice contexts, their years of practice experience and other demographic details. See below, Table 2: Descriptions of Participants.

Table 2: Descriptions of Participants

Queensland CD practitioners / Gender	Contexts of Practice	Years of experience	Victorian CD practitioners / Gender	Contexts of Practice	Years of experience
Q1 F	Regional / Geographic / CALD / NGO	4	V1 M	Urban / Geographic / NGO	43
Q2 F	Regional / Geographic / NGO	15	V2 F	Urban / CALD / Indigenous / NGO	3
Q3 F	Regional / Housing / NGO	28	V3 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	10
Q4 M	Rural / Indigenous / NGO	16	V4 F	Urban / Network / NGO	15
Q5 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	30	V5 F	Urban / Network / Local Govt	10
Q6 F	Urban / Indigenous / NGO	7	V6 F	Urban / CALD / Local Govt	5
Q7 F	Urban / Aging / Peak Body / NGO	17	V7 F	Urban / Geographic / Local Govt	11
Q8 F	Regional / Geographic / NGO	4	V8 F	Urban / CALD / Indigenous /NGO	10
Q9 M	Urban / Youth / Local Govt	23	V9 M	Urban / Health / University	5
Q10 M	Urban / Geographic / Network / NGO	38	V10 M	Rural / Network / NGO	12
			V11 F	Urban / Geographic / NGO	34
			V12 M	Rural / CALD / Local Govt	7

Key:

Male, Female (M, F)

Urban, Regional or Rural

Geographic - Work within a specific geographic community (see above).

Focus on particular groups of community members eg CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds), Indigenous, young people, older people, or networks of other practitioners / neighbourhood houses

Issue specific – eg health, community housing

Employing agency – NGO (non-Government organization) eg. co-operative, CD association, neighbourhood centre, or larger state-wide or national NGO with a locality focus; local government; peak body (an organization that represent its member organizations); or university

4.5.4 Gaining Consent to Participate

All participants who were chosen were provided with an information sheet detailing the aim of the research and its processes. See Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet. They were also provided with an interview consent form. The consent form sought the participant's consent to be interviewed and for the researcher to record the interview using an audio digital recorder. See Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form. The signed consent form was collected at the commencement of each interview.

4.5.5 Conducting the Stage One Interviews

The interviews were conducted over a seven-month period, March 2009 to September 2009. Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted in a location most suitable to the participant, usually their place of employment. Two telephone interviews were conducted with rural and regional Queensland practitioners. The length of the interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 112 minutes. The face-to-face and telephone forms of interviewing were qualitatively different as face-to-face interactions draw on both visual and verbal communication. I am satisfied that both the face-to-face and telephone interviews were of a similar standard and met the requirements for this study.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Minichiello et al. 2008) were held to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of 'structure'. A detailed interview guide (Minichiello et al. 2008) was developed (See Appendix 3, Stage One Interview Guide). The guide was developed to raise general topics for discussion without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions (Minichiello et al. 2008:90), allowing flexibility to explore topics and issues dialogically with the participants. Furthermore, Patton (2002) argues that interview guides are useful to focus on and illuminate various subject matter within the limited timeframe of an interview. However, their limitation is that important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted. To circumvent this, opportunities for other matters outside of the interview guide were explored during the interview process. An active interviewing style was employed, one which sought to probe for clarification and elaboration, and distill meaning (Minichiello et al. 2008).

The aims of the questions asked at interview were four-fold:

- To gain an understanding of the practitioners' work settings, their main tasks and the purpose of their work;
- To gain an understanding of participants' conceptualisation of structural dimensions of practice. These were first explored in a very general sense, for example, "If I was to say the word 'structure', what comes to mind about your practice?" Then followed exploration of more specific concepts found in the literature, for example, 'disadvantage', 'citizenship' and 'transformation', and how practice may or may not have a bearing on these concepts.
- To gain an understanding of the main approaches or methods participants are using to achieve their practice goals. This included both critical inputs and barriers to achieving their practice goals.
- To gain an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of practice. Participants were asked about the challenges they were currently facing, as well as any opportunities that were emerging for their practice at the time of the interview.

The interviews used a "funneling" questioning style (Minichiello et al. 2008:94-95), whereby the interviewer controls the flow of the information being sought. The interviews start with questions of a broad and general nature. Later, more specific and potentially challenging questions are asked towards the end of the interview, once rapport is built (Minichiello et al. 2008). Hence, questions about current challenges for practice were asked towards the end of the interview.

Another questioning technique used throughout the interview was the use of storytelling. It is a device used to parallel an ordinary conversation, and involves an extended monologue in which the interviewer takes the role of active listener (Minichiello et al. 2008). The technique was used at times to follow up a specific question in which a more theoretical concept had been explored, and to provide an illustration of how that theoretical concept was enacted in real life. For example, Appendix 4 is an excerpt of an interview where the

participant was asked if they could share a story about how processes of community development had enabled people to overcome disadvantages or marginalisation. See Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews.

4.5.5.1 Recording of the Interviews

The interviews were all recorded using a digital recorder, with prior permission having been gained from each participant. During the interview, the researcher wrote notes about points of interest made by the participants, particularly if something needed to be clarified. Rather than interrupting the flow of the participant's story or an answer to a question, any queries were noted as the person was talking and followed up when they had concluded their answer. Interruption of the participant sometimes resulted in loss of ideas or a 'train of thought'. Sometimes, the participant commenced another subject by way of explanation, resulting in the first subject being left unexplored.

4.5.6 Conducting Stage Two Consensus Conference Groups

Two group meetings were held – one in Melbourne on the 24th November, 2009 and one in Brisbane on the 8th December, 2009. Prior to the Melbourne meeting, six participants indicated their intention to participate, however only three came on the day. Of those three, one came late to the meeting and another person left early. Therefore, apart from a short crossover of time (approximately 15 minutes), only two participants were present together. In Brisbane, three participants attended the meeting in person, and three from regional and rural locations teleconferenced into the meeting. All of these participants stayed for the duration of the meeting, with one arriving twenty minutes after the meeting commenced.

The group meetings took, respectively, 1 hour, 59 minutes (Melbourne meeting) and 2 hours, 13 minutes (Brisbane meeting). To enable transcription of the meeting content, a video camera and an audio digital recorder recorded both meetings. Prior permission was gained from each participant about the use of the recording devices. See Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups).

The aim of the two group meetings was to engage in a cooperative knowledge building exercise around a theory of structural community development. Discussion was based on a Findings Paper distributed to participants prior to the meeting. This is discussed in 4.6.2, in this chapter.

4.5.6.1 Meeting Agenda

Participants were given a draft meeting agenda and consent forms prior to the meetings. The meeting agenda was based on the questions posed in the findings paper and the time constraints for each meeting. However, there was an opportunity for participants to propose additional agenda items. This occurred at the start of both groups, to ensure the practitioner-led goals were also being met.

The aims of the meeting processes were four-fold:

- To gain a group agreement about the goals of the meeting, the role of the ‘observer’, and teleconferencing etiquette (for the Brisbane meeting).
- To gain a general understanding about what aspects of the findings paper resonated with attendees and what concepts they felt were missing from the paper that might be thought of as related to a theory of structural community development.
- To gain an understanding about more specific concepts, particularly those that elicited contradictory theorising across the cohort at interview, or concepts that held some kind of tension between concepts. These included discussion on concepts such as ‘disadvantage’, processes of ‘collective transformation’ and ‘class’.
- To distill some normative characteristics (Mikkelsen 2005) of structural community development through the use of a nominal group technique.

As with the individual interviews, attempts were made to elicit knowledge and wisdom from the participants using a funneling technique, moving the conversation from general to more specific topics, and then proceeding to very specific conclusions with the nominal group

technique. Sometimes, questions were asked and answered using a 'round-robin' technique, where every person had an opportunity to respond in turn. However, the aim was also to achieve dialogue between participants. I purposefully used eye contact across the group, seeking responses from any or all participants in relation to a particular participant's comments. At the Brisbane meeting, I constantly checked with the three teleconferencing participants whether they had reflections to make or add. This all contributed to the consensus-building process, where I specifically asked for agreement or disagreement about a particular individual's view.

I was especially careful to ensure the three teleconferencing participants at the Brisbane meeting felt included and were aware of what was happening throughout the meeting. For example, I informed them when one attendee arrived after the meeting had commenced. During the nominal group technique, where participants' ideas were recorded in the public space on blank paper, I talked through my actions so teleconferencing participants knew what was happening.

4.5.6.2 Nominal Group Technique

A nominal group technique was used to elicit opinions about what participants' believed were the critical issues that help or hinder the practice of structural community development. Fontana and Frey (2000:651) describe the technique as a structured and controlled process, where participants rank ideas in terms of importance (Minichiello et al. 2008:160). Its use captures a range of opinions and also gives all participants equal opportunity to provide input.

Attendees were asked to list three concepts that help or hinder structural community development practice. They did this through a process of individual reflection and then, in turn, read out their responses. These were publicly recorded on blank paper. At the Melbourne meeting, where there were two people remaining in attendance at the time of the nominal group technique, six ideas were generated. At the Brisbane meeting, where six attendees were in attendance at the time of the nominal group technique, 18 ideas were generated. Rather than rank responses in order of importance, all ideas were considered of equal importance.

The consensus-building aim of the consensus conference meetings was assisted by the nominal group technique. It allowed participants to hear and see other people's responses and, where ideas were the same, a connecting line was made between them on the paper, creating a visual link. This occurred when the ideas expressed were the same but perhaps different language was used. In these cases, clarification was sought from the contributing participant to see if the concepts meant the same thing, or if they meant different things.

In summary, the consensus conference group meetings contributed to praxis when, together, practitioners explored and theorised ideas about structural community development. They were encouraged to think critically about concepts discussed and, through dialogue with their colleagues, gain consensus about concepts. Where divergent opinions emerged within the group, consensus was reached that the practice is broad enough to value a variety of positions and explanations, and therefore, the divergence was deemed warranted.

4.5.6.3 Use of an Observer

An 'observer' was used at both meetings. The observer had two main roles. One was to ensure the video recorder recorded the meeting and the other was to take notes about the order in which participants spoke. Each participant was ascribed a code, for example, 'Participant 1', 'Participant 2', and so on. An example of what the observer wrote was: "Question 3: A, 1, 4, 2, A". This means that, in relation to question three, Athena (the researcher) spoke first (introducing the question), then participant number one spoke next, followed by participant number four, and so on. This role was needed because it was predicted that, at times, more than one participant was likely to speak at the same time, making it difficult to distinguish the individual voices on the recording devices.

Two different people were recruited to be observers, one for the Melbourne meeting and one for the Brisbane meeting. Recruitment of observers was achieved by contacting the post-graduate research coordinators at universities in Melbourne and Brisbane, requesting that they pass on an invitation to their post-graduate research students asking for a volunteer to help with the research. It was a requirement that the 'observer' was not involved in the community development field, to ensure they would not inadvertently contribute to discussion at the meetings. The research participants at each meeting were informed of the

identity of the observer prior to the meeting, giving them the opportunity to agree to the observer's attendance.

4.5.7 Ethics

Ethical clearance for the study, "An exploration of the relationship between structure and community development practice: towards a theory of structural community development", was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee, Social Work and Human Services, University of Queensland in February 2009. Clearance Number: SWAHS2009/1/1.

The main ethical issues with both the individual interviews and the consensus conference groups were around recording the interviews and group meetings. This may have had ramifications, particularly in relation to the identification of employers or other people involved in community development processes, especially if participants spoke about these entities or people in a negative way. Participants were given written assurance that all data collected would be de-identified in transcriptions. Providing this assurance of de-identification allowed participants greater freedom to participate in discussion, as they did not have to concern themselves with self-censorship. Without compromising the meanings of concepts found in the data, pseudonyms were used to disguise the data so confidentiality could be assured. In seven cases, participants took up the offer to receive a copy of their de-identified transcript. In one of those cases, amendments were made by that participant to further de-identify content or to remove content.

4.5.8 Transcription of the Interview and Group Meeting Data

The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews from Stage One verbatim. Usually transcription occurred immediately after each interview, except for times when interviews were scheduled in short-timeframes. For example, all of the Victorian interviews took place within a three-week period. Transcription of these interviews took place after I returned to my office.

The transcription period was six months in duration, with over 210,000 words transcribed across the twenty-two interviews. I transcribed the interviews with the view of immersing

myself in the data, and taking advantage of this process to begin recording memos about emerging themes and questions, which could be formulated for the second stage group processes.

The approach to transcription prepared me for a thematic analysis of the data. The process involved completely transcribing verbatim what was said in the interview, including the pauses and utterances, for example, ‘ums’, ‘ahs’, and laughter. Inflections in voice were also noted, for example, notes about emotion (*incredulously*) or (*angrily*). Full transcription in this fashion occurred because the meaning of words as text can be forgotten as time goes by, and this strategy reminded me of a participant’s meaning without having to re-listen to recorded conversations. However, at times during the analysis stage, parts of voice recordings were listened to again to re-check a participant’s meaning if that was unclear from the transcribed text. The analysis of the interviews focused on themes in the respondents’ comments. The manner of how these were presented remained in the background, rather than the focus of the analysis.

The transcripts of the individual interviews ranged from 5,969 words to 12,725 words. The transcript of the Queensland meeting was 13,938 words and the transcript of the Melbourne meeting was 14,507 words.

Both Stage Two meetings were transcribed in full by me and were provided to the participants that attended the particular meetings. This took place within one month of the meetings being held.

4.6 The Analysis Process

Patton (2002) states that research texts typically make the distinction that analysis in research begins after the data collection process has ended. However, Patton also argues,

But the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis far less absolute. In the course of fieldwork, ideas about directions for analysis will occur. Patterns take shape. Possible themes spring to mind (2002:436).

This was the case with this research. The iterative nature of this study involved the formulation of interview questions based on both the original conceptual design, and through the emergence of themes in the content. This led to further investigation about specific areas of community development practice undertaken at Stage Two where, through those processes, additional patterns of themes in the content emerged.

The qualitative analysis process for this study can be described as a form of “analytic induction”, the process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to a mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman 2011:206). Analysing data means systematically organising, integrating and examining data, and looking for patterns and relationships among the specific details (Neuman 2011). Analysis also allows the researcher to “improve understanding, expand theory and advance knowledge” (Neuman 2011:507).

Thematic structures and overarching constructs (Patton 2002) emerged during the analysis when examining the transcribed interviews, referred to here as text. “Categorical indexing” (Mason 2002:150) was undertaken, which means applying a uniform set of indexing categories systemically and consistently to the data. This involved reading a small section of the text, such as a paragraph, and allocating a categorical name to it, for example “social justice”. However, Mason (2002) argues that this type of simple indexing has limitations, particularly if the coding produces categories so broad or bland as to be of limited further use. This process can also be problematic if the category is to be used across cases, where comparison or connections are being made with more than one text. These problems occurred during the categorical indexing for this study. For example, in relation to the theme “social justice”, the way in which different participants talked *about* social justice differed, therefore I needed to create other categories or sub-categories of the theme with different names. By doing this, I was assured that I was capturing the variety of ways in which a theme was discussed. Another limitation of index coding is where a section of text relates to more than one theme or concept at a time, thus requiring a more sophisticated way of creating both unrelated and interrelated categories and subcategories (Mason 2002). The level of sophistication of analysis in this study increased as different processes of analysis were employed. These processes are discussed in the next three sub-sections.

4.6.1 Analysis Process of Stage One

To begin analysing the Stage One data a mind-mapping process was undertaken. When transcribing each in-depth interview, conceptual maps were created of the main concepts on large sheets of paper. Salanda (2011:133) refers to this type of visual representation of data as “think display”. The magnitude of text can be essentialised into graphics, “at-a-glance”, with various shapes and lines displaying names of codes, categories and concepts (Salanda 2011:133).

Twenty-four conceptual maps were created, roughly in line with the various interview questions asked. Each conceptual map had concept ‘bubbles’, which outlined the key concepts discussed, as well as a reference to the participant(s) who referred to that concept. See Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map. Being able to see the conceptual maps helped my thinking about the relationships between the concepts and questions asked, and how these might be written about in a findings paper.

The limitation with this approach became evident as the process progressed. With twenty-four conceptual maps, it became somewhat unwieldy to examine these simultaneously. The other limitation was this approach is limited by the finite amount of content I could fit on each map. Hence, some of the questions required more than one conceptual map to adequately visualize all the concepts found within them.

Therefore, although helpful to me in relation to visualizing concepts, mind mapping was only helpful as a broad ‘first treatment’ of data analysis. It was sufficient, however, to enable me to write a findings paper, which was used as a base document for the Stage Two processes. From this experience, I knew I would need to use a more comprehensive tool to allow me to undertake more thorough analysis of data from Stage One and Stage Two. Subsequently, NVivo (Bazeley 2007) was used, a computer software program, enabling me to organise and analyse the data more thoroughly.

4.6.2. The Findings Paper

Appendix 7 reproduces a twenty-three-page findings paper that was written from the conceptual maps. All twenty-two participants agreed to receive the paper. It presented findings based on a synthesis of all twenty-two participants' voices and perspectives. Descriptions and explanations about the subject matter were clustered under various headings.

Throughout the paper, questions for reflection were posed. Participants were invited to individually respond to the paper by telephone or in writing. Alternatively, they were invited to attend a group meeting with other Stage One participants to discuss the questions. The questions for reflection in the paper were designed to elicit opinions about:

- the paper's accuracy;
- whether major points made during the interviews were reflected in the paper;
- whether major points were missing from the paper;
- the diversity of views or contradictions around specific subject matter;
- unexpected omissions from the data (for example, participants mostly told stories of experiences they had observed of individual transformation, not group transformation as a result of participation in community development process. Likewise, there was no mention of the concept of 'class', despite its predominance in the literature);
- how more 'aspirational' aspects of practice might be translated into concrete action; and,
- whether there are normative processes for structural community development, and if so, what are participants' suggestions for engaging in this type of practice.

A challenge related to this stage of the process involves the time lapse between participants' individual interviews and receipt of the findings paper, which occurred on the 10th November 2009. The longest time lapse was with participant number one, who was interviewed on 23rd March 2009. The shortest time lapse was with participant number 22; who was interviewed on 15th September 2009. The time lapse was longer than expected because, as previously mentioned, the length of time to transcribe the individual interviews took several months, and this delayed the writing schedule for the findings paper.

Two participants responded to the paper in writing, providing responses to all the questions posed. Nine other participants participated in the group meetings. Therefore, eleven of the twenty-two participants interviewed were involved in the second stage of the research process.

4.6.3 Subsequent Analysis Process of Stages One and Two

The qualitative data gathered from the Stage One interviews, the Stage Two responses to the findings paper and the two group meetings were analysed with the aid of NVivo. Darlington and Scott (2002:145) state that qualitative analysis of research data is concerned with identifying patterns in the data. In this study, patterns within the data focused on themes in participants' perspectives of professional practices relating to various dimensions of structure. These are known in coding terms as "strategy codes" (Bogdan & Bilken 2007:177).

The context in which practice occurs, known in coding terms as "setting / context codes" (Bogdan & Bilken 2007:174) was also relevant. Various contexts presented different types of data, where practice was shaped by the particularities associated with the specific type of practice. For example, when working as a community development practitioner with people from CALD backgrounds, culturally specific or cross-cultural practices are an important element in practice. This may be very different for a community development practitioner who is working in the micro-finance or social-enterprise field.

When commencing with Nvivo, "cases" were created. Cases refer to the unit of analysis in the research study (Bazeley 2007:42). The cases provided information about the various particularities of each participant, including their gender, educational background, type of work, locality, years of experience, and so on. Subsequently, 410 coding "nodes" were created, based on stories and concepts discussed by participants. Nodes provide the storage areas in NVivo for references to coded text (Bazeley 2007:15). Nodes could be categorized as being about: contextual factors for practice; concepts or practitioner analysis; practice-related subject matter; practitioner-related subject matter; and subject matter relating to practice aims and outcomes. The nodes were clumped into themes and these became "tree nodes". Tree nodes are a structured way to show how ideas connect together, either because

they represent similar kinds of concepts or are related in some practical or theoretical way (Bazeley 2007:99). See Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node.

Both the conceptual framework and the research questions drove the creation of nodes. They were created when analysing data as it relates to particular theoretical concepts. Also, in line with the constructionist nature of study, nodes were created when themes emerged based on a range of responses to interview questions. When all the nodes were created, the research questions were revisited. The question was asked, “Which nodes are involved in answering this research question?” For each research question, the nodes that were considered helpful in answering the question were clustered together. For each question, however, helpful nodes and any missing nodes or exceptions were examined. The intersection of the nodes and cases was also examined, for example, the similarities and differences between demographics; gender; training; current employment; and length of employment.

When a clear theme emerged from the clustering exercise, a “memo” was written. In NVivo, these relate to the keeping of a journal (Bazeley 2007:29), which is a writing process that “often provides sharp, sunlight moments of clarity or insight – little conceptual epiphanies”. For my purposes, writing memos was a way I could organise my thoughts and test out how cogent a theme was in relation to answering a research question. Five memos were written on subjects including: “citizenship”; the “nominal group technique”; “outcomes of group meetings”; “structuring beyond the local” and “what this practice looks like”.

For all of the data analysis chapters, several iterations of analysis occurred. As themes were categorised and findings written, the act of writing often inspired further analysis, and, thus further writing. For example, version two of Chapter Five discussed a theme about ‘structure as a source of oppression’. However, subsequent analysis revealed a more macro concept, ‘power’. This shifted the analysis to a higher level of abstraction (Neuman 2011:64). Often, concepts at a higher level of abstraction remained as themes discussed in the final iteration of the chapter. This process of re-categorisation of themes was evidence of a deeper examination of the data, looking particularly at the relationships between concepts.

Chapter Five and its focus on practitioners’ analysis answers the first research question on how ‘structure’ was conceptualised. Chapter Six and its focus on practitioners’ approaches to practice answers the second research question. Chapter Seven and its focus on frameworks

for practice answers two questions on frameworks of practice and the effectiveness of practice.

Chapter Five is a relatively straightforward description of themes and concepts as they came together around the subject matter of practitioners' thoughts on 'structure'. Chapter Six is written in a storytelling style, where eleven stories are told to illustrate themes about how practice is being carried out. This was a particularly satisfying chapter to write, given the paucity of literature about specific approaches to community development in contemporary Australian practice contexts. Chapter Seven merges elements from both Chapters Five and Six and other data to reveal three key frameworks of practice drawn upon by practitioners. Of the three data analysis chapters, Chapter Seven is written most analytically and critically. It is more analytical in the sense that frameworks are distilled from the accounts of practitioners and presented in a format showing commonalities and differences across the sample. It is more critical in the sense that it focuses on the political and social ramifications of fieldwork (Saldana 2011:157), as was told to me through the accounts of practitioners. All three data analysis chapters quote participants "verbatim" to illustrate, in their voice, salient points and themes.

4.7 Limitations of the Research Design and Methods

Limitations refer to conditions that may impact on findings of a research project and delimitations refer to a study's particular boundaries (O'Leary 2005). Both of these have relevance to this study.

4.7.1 Issues of Trustworthiness

The two main threats to trustworthiness of the qualitative conclusions of this research project are "researcher bias" and "reactivity" (Maxwell 2005:108). Both of these involve the subjectivity of me, the researcher. I was mindful of my own views when selecting data. I ensured that the data selected was across the range of views, including my own.

To reduce the possibility of researcher bias and to ensure a more rigorous process, my advisors provided peer checking with one of the interviews. Early in the interview schedule,

they read raw data to check on both the interview processes, and to ensure I followed up areas of investigation evenly. They independently coded the data for that transcript, so we could compare these with my coding, to check for reliability. “Coding is the most difficult operation for inexperienced researchers to understand and master” states Strauss (1987) cited in Neuman (2011:511), therefore, this peer review process played an important role in my development as a beginning researcher.

I was aware that the concepts inherent within this study could have been somewhat challenging to practitioners, especially if they felt that their practice was not matching up to the emancipatory potential of community development to which the literature so often alludes. Indeed, this very fact, that the realities often *do not* match the rhetoric, was one of the drivers for me to undertake this research. Therefore, in relation to “reactivity” (Maxwell 2005:108-109), it was my intention that this study would more accurately describe both the challenges *to* and spaces *for* resistance, and the emancipatory or transformatory potential of community development.

4.7.2 Other Limitations, Delimitation and Difficulties

Limitations relating to the use of mind mapping as a conceptual tool have already been discussed. There is another limitation around sampling. Although I sought as diverse a sample as possible to elicit a range of opinions, I was unable to cover all relevant areas of difference. The focus on recruitment from only two Australian states might also be considered a delimitation (O’Leary 2005). Other styles of community development are likely to be taught and practiced in other Australian states. Furthermore, this research process interviewed practitioners only, not community members who are often involved in community development processes. Therefore, I have generated a view of community development from the practitioner perspective only.

The limitation of sampling also applies to the consensus conference processes which, Sniderman (1999) argues, requires a diversity of membership to be effective. It would be fair to say that the Brisbane meeting generated more varied data. I attribute this to the diverse backgrounds of these practitioners, but also to the nature of the consensus conference group process, which worked more successfully with a larger number of attendees. A great degree

of consensus was reached in the Victorian meeting because there were only a small number of people contributing ideas, however, it was more difficult to elicit a breadth of opinion in this setting.

Furthermore, an aim of the consensus conference group process was to generate praxis. I now believe this technique is limited without the participation of greater numbers of people. Also, the fact that the meeting only occurred once demonstrated to me that praxis could only have been achieved through more *continuing* processes; assuming praxis is *ever* truly attainable. Certainly, feedback from the Brisbane participants after the meeting (when I sent them the meeting transcript) indicated that the meeting was very helpful to their analysis as individuals. They all heartily responded to my somewhat optimistic wish to find opportunities to keep this type of dialogue going, as all who attended appreciated the collective nature of the analysis process.

4.8 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has justified and described the methodology undertaken in this study. The chapter has explored the epistemological approach, that is, social constructionism with a critical theory lens, and categorised the type of study as practitioner research. In an effort to be transparent and unambiguous, the processes of data gathering, data processing and data analysis have been thoroughly discussed. The limitations and restrictions inherent within the methods have also been discussed, demonstrating an understanding that certain limits exist within all social research, including those relevant to this study. The findings of qualitative research cannot, strictly speaking, be generalised. However, by setting out the methodological processes clearly and systematically, the study could be replicated in other contexts. Processes such as the ones used in this study could be used to generate other types of practice theory. The rigour employed throughout the various processes confirms a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity, and therefore, credibility (Patton 2002) in terms of the results. The following three chapters report these results. Each chapter provides discussion on the themes that emerged from the extensive analysis and, in their entirety, are relevant to the theory-building exercise on Structural Community Development discussed in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring Practitioner's Analysis on Structure and Community Development

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is the first of three reporting the results of this study. It addresses the first research question: “How do practitioners think about structure in their work”? It examines the kinds of *analysis* practitioners apply when approaching their work. They analyse the circumstances of their constituents, as well as the state of affairs within society more generally, particularly those that have a bearing on how practitioners’ constituents experience their lives. Practitioners apply various lenses or frameworks to analyse what is happening in a given context and this analysis informs the decisions they make about how to proceed with their community development work within those contexts.

The next section provides an overview of the way themes were addressed when practitioners discussed the idea of ‘structure’. Six observations can be made about how structure was discussed. This section qualifies the data into parts of speech, for example, nouns, verbs and adjectives. This approach was used as an analytical tool when first examining the data based on Burkett’s (2001) theorising, which discusses modernist and postmodernist interpretations of specific concepts. Further, the related concept, “grammatical variance” (Burkett & Kelly 2008), is introduced to highlight processes that have the potential to increase a person’s sense of agency and is an important concept, particularly when one is thinking about “structure”. Four sections that discuss, in more detail, practitioners’ analysis, follow this. The themes distilled include, “Structures in Society” (Section Three); “Power” (Section Four); “Agency” (Section Five); and the idea of “Structuring Community Development Work” (Section Six). Conceptual or mind maps are used in each of the sections, providing a visual representation of concepts at-a-glance (Salanda 2011).

Implications arising from these discussions include: 1. Taking a postmodernist interpretation of structure can impact on practitioners’ sense of agency; 2. Structure can be viewed as a system that has both barriers, but also intangible qualities that enable practice; 3. The

centrality of an analysis of power and the structural implications this has on people's lives and on practice seems essential; 4. Structure can be viewed in terms of agency, processes that enable creativity in structure-making and in generating choices; 5. Structuring work involves a range of skills and processes to sustain work over time, and makes micro-macro connections to effect change.

At interview, participants were encouraged to explore their understanding of 'structure' in community development. They did this by responding to the interview question, "If I was to say words such as 'structure', 'structuring', 'structural', 'structured', what comes to mind about your community development practice?" There was a vast difference in word length when practitioners answered this interview question. The shortest response was 46 words and the longest was 1926 words, with 326 words being the median length. Responses to the question up to 400 words largely were definitional in nature, that is, practitioners chose one of the prompt words and defined it. Those using between 620 – 1926 words included both a definition of the prompt word and one or more examples of how this understanding is applied in practice.

Participants also discussed structure as a concept in the remainder of their interviews and at the Stage Two group meetings. While participants' responses to the question on structure were a starting point in answering this research question, data from both stages is included in this analysis.

Throughout this and the subsequent findings chapters, direct quotations are used to illustrate points being made. The quotations are coded in three ways representing the different ways data was collected. For example:

1. At the individual interviews, "Q1" means Queensland participant, number one.
2. At the group meetings, "VM4" means Victorian participant, number four who attended the Victorian meeting.
3. Written responses to the findings, "Q1, Stage Two" means Queensland participant, number one who corresponded.

5.2 The idea of “Structure”

This section reports six general observations that can be made about the way participants discussed the concept of structure and community development, including:

1. Their use of all the prompt words;
2. The way they either repeated the prompts, or used synonyms for them;
3. The number of prompt words used;
4. The way in which the prompt words were discussed as concepts that can be categorized as nouns, verbs or adjectives;
5. The way the participants changed these categories over the course of the interview; and
6. How the concept of structure evoked discussions about power.

The *first observation* is that all four prompts words were discussed across all the interviews, but no one participant discussed all four prompts. “Structure” was discussed as structures in society, or new types of structures created through community development. “Structuring” and “structured” were discussed as ways of organising community development work. For example, practitioners discussed structuring processes or working in a structured or unstructured way. The word “structural” was used as either structural change or structural analysis.

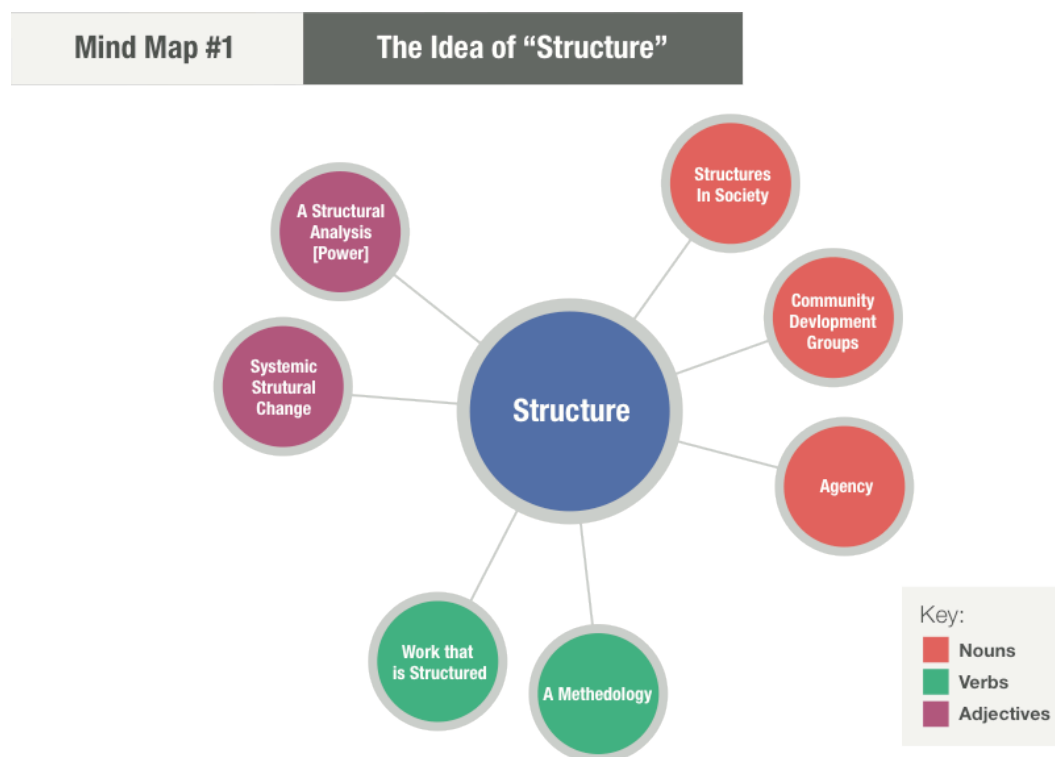
The *second observation* is that, across the group, 18 out of 22 practitioners repeated one or more of the words and went on to discuss their application to practice. However, in four cases, none of the prompt words were used but others were utilised as synonyms for the prompt words. In two of these cases, the word “system” (V5, V12) was used to discuss the structures in society. In another case, the word “strategy” (V8) was used, because the work of V8 involves strategic thinking and action. In the final case, the non-word “structuralisation” (V6) was used as a simile for an employing organisation that V6 perceived to be overly bureaucratic.

The *third observation* is that, 12 of the 22 practitioners chose *one* of the prompt words and answered the question directly in relation to that chosen word. In these instances, their practice was represented by a single image or metaphor for practice. The remaining ten

practitioners chose *two* of the prompt words to formulate their answer to the question. They discussed these in turn, using more than one image or metaphor to describe practice.

The remaining observations qualify the data by using parts of speech, that is, nouns, verbs and adjectives. This resonates with Burkett's (2001) ideas about modernist and postmodernist concepts being seen in terms of nouns and verbs. Burkett does not talk about adjectives, and conceptualizing them this way may also be helpful when thinking about community development. See diagram below, (Figure 2), which is a visual representation of the data.

Figure 2: Mind Map #1, The Idea of Structure



The diagram shows how concepts can be seen as nouns, verbs or adjectives. This diagram is reproduced in other sections of this chapter, where various elements of the diagram are focused on, in turn. The nouns include the concepts: *Structure in Society*; *Community Development Groups* and *Agency*. The verbs include the concepts: *Work that is Structured* and *A Methodology*. The Adjectives included the concepts: *A Structural Analysis* and

Systemic Structural Change. The remaining discussion in this chapter provides detailed descriptions of these concepts.

The *fourth observation* is that for 20 of the 22 responses, practice was discussed as either a *noun* or a *verb*. In 15 instances, nouns were utilised; these included various tangible objects, such as structures in society or the political, financial and social service systems that are the context for practice. In 12 of these 15 cases, the structures or systems discussed were perceived as oppressive or causing disadvantage for the practitioners' constituents. Other tangible objects included the various vehicles through which community development is carried out. For example, a group, often formed by community members, can be a vehicle to carry forward particular agendas of its members. These groups take on particular characteristics based on the processes and analysis of the group members.

Another noun, *agency*, was used explicitly by one practitioner who had studied the concept of structure and agency in other research. Apart from this practitioner, all others used the term more implicitly. There is a qualitative difference between the noun 'agency' and the other nouns discussed above. Therefore, on this occasion, agency could be viewed more like a verb, as it is about acting.

In 13 instances, *verbs* were utilised as various ways practice is organised by practitioners. Ten practitioners talked about structure this way. V8 and V10 spoke about ways they have organised or structured their work, one in which they plan for and strategise action. V7 also emphasised ways they structure to increase accountability and how the field of community development could raise its esteem alongside other fields of practice. Four others, Q4, Q6, V9 and V11, discussed how they structured processes situationally. They intentionally use unstructured approaches to remain responsive to community issues as they arise. The final three practitioners, Q3, Q5 and Q9, discussed structural practice as a specific methodological approach they use to initiate community development processes, form groups and sustain groups over time.

With the remaining two cases, practice was discussed as either a verb or noun *and* as an *adjective*. As an adjective, Q5 referred to having a "structural analysis", that is, Q5's perception about an analysis of structures in society causing oppression, as opposed to individuals blaming themselves for difficult circumstances in which they might find

themselves. V4 referred to “structural change”, that is, V4’s perception that community development aims to bring about “systemic structural change” (V4). This understanding is that some structures in society impact negatively on people and others do not, and therefore, practice is an exercise in “how we can manage to make structures work well for people” (V4).

These adjectives are used in two different ways. V4 has a perception that community development is a way to achieve a goal, this is, structural change. The change being referred to is one that creates a more egalitarian society, where particular groups, by virtue of particular characteristics, are not any more disadvantaged than other groups in society. However, when Q5 uses the adjective “structural analysis”, the perception is that community development is exercised as analysing power.

The *fifth observation* is that the 12 practitioners who discussed structure as a noun or as a verb *only* did not necessarily continue to hold that singular interpretation throughout the whole interview. Indeed, the very next question at interview saw five out of the seven who spoke of structure as tangible objects only (nouns) subsequently giving examples of structure as change-oriented processes in which they have been involved (verbs). Their examples discussed ways of structuring or organising their work to bring about some sort of desirable change.

This change of interpretation from nouns to verbs took place when participants answered the interview question: “Do you view your thinking about structural aspects of practice as somewhat *aspirational*, meaning you hope for it, but you know that it’s not very achievable in the day-to-day realities of your work?” In hindsight, this was a somewhat clumsily worded question, but nevertheless, one that every participant answered forthrightly. For those who changed their response from utilising nouns to utilising verbs over the two questions, I interpret their responses to mean that they have a view of structure that goes beyond a functionalist standpoint (Giddens 2009). Rather than imagining fixed objects exercising a function in society, they see structures as objects that may be acted upon. Viewing structures in society as verbs means community development employs mechanisms for acting, relating and behaving purposefully to achieve particular goals. It also suggests pliability and variability, possibly favourable characteristics when considering practitioners’

analysis about structures being oppressive, resulting in disadvantage for some groups within society. These structures may have the potential for change.

The two practitioners who spoke about structures in society as tangible objects and *did not* alter this stance when asked the subsequent interview question were particularly emphasising how their organisational context creates barriers for themselves and their constituents. They *agreed* with the subsequent question about structural aspects of practice being somewhat aspirational, and perhaps not achievable. Their perception was that their organisational context causes too many barriers for positive outcomes to be achieved.

For the remaining five practitioners who originally utilised verbs, when answering the subsequent “aspirational” question, they remained with their initial interpretation of the prompt words. They went on to answer this question by providing further examples of structuring or organising processes as a day-to-day reality in their work.

Using nouns and verbs as a framework to analyse practitioner’s responses to the interview question becomes significant from the standpoint of examining community development from modernist and postmodernist viewpoints. Burkett (2001) argued that community development practice traditions have relied predominantly on modernist reference points when viewing ‘community’ and ‘community practice’. These are based around notions of fixity, objectivity and universalism, with fixed characteristics and spaces, objective structures and universalised ideals (Burkett 2001). However, postmodern interpretations of community development emphasise creative possibilities for working in the contested contexts of practice brought about by globalization (Burkett, 2001) and the competing discourses inherent within these contexts (Kenny, 2002). Burkett (2001) argued that viewing community and community practice as a verb, not a noun, brings “meaning”, “context” and “relationality” to the forefront of analysis. This is a more dynamic approach to engaging with human complexity. This approach is “processual” and represents new kinds of communities relevant for the 21st Century (Burkett 2001).

Qualifying data into parts of speech has a deeper significance, and relates to a particular dialogical tool used by practitioners when communicating with others. Burkett and Kelly (2008) argue that, in dialogue, grammatical variance plays an important function as it can help loosen the fixedness of meaning of key words by deliberately unveiling the multiple

meanings that are associated with them. Nouns tend to name objects and situations and give the impression of fixedness, whereas verbs or action-oriented words focus on action and describe what is to be done (Burkett & Kelly 2008). If, in one's speech, nouns are being used to totalize or dominate in ways that cause one to become overwhelmed or paralyzed by a situation, then the skillful use of grammatical variance in dialogue can have a liberating effect. This occurs, for example, if a situation is seen in new ways, such as an array of human energy or diversity that may present a new picture (Burkett & Kelly 2008). In terms of the narratives of the majority of participants in this study, the heuristic 'structure' was viewed in terms of 'structure-making'. It was also viewed in terms of the myriad of relationships practitioners hold with people within an organisational structure or bureaucracy. One could argue that both of these uses of structure demonstrates participants have gained agency. They do not view a structure as a fixed, one-dimensional, immovable entity, but they view structure in term of process, where the possibilities to build relationships, develop actions and effect change are endless.

The observations discussed so far reveal that, regardless of whether practitioners responded with a single image or multiple images of practice, they all demonstrated an analysis of structure as: tangible objects; people having agency; ways practice is organised; the importance of having a structural analysis; that community development is about structural change; or various combinations of these. It was not surprising to see such an emphasis being placed on action-oriented thinking, given that community development practice is primarily about activating and mobilising communities. However, the observed shift, from views about structures in societies as tangible objects that are often oppressive to views about pliable structures that can be acted upon, was significant. It suggests that most practitioners do not have an uncritical acceptance of societal structures' role in oppression. Rather, they have an analysis about the proactive role community development can have in acting upon societal structures to create a more egalitarian or just society.

Finally, the *sixth observation* is that 20 of the 22 practitioners revealed an explicit analysis about structure *and power*. These included perceptions of power in five ways and are discussed, in detail, further on:

1. Power and structures in society;
2. Analysing power;

3. Influencing powerful structures;
4. Empowerment; and
5. A structural analysis.

The two practitioners who did not discuss power explicitly in response to the first interview question discussed the concept at other times throughout the interview. In both cases, they discussed their perceptions of how community development processes can be empowering for people who engage in them. Therefore, all 22 practitioners, either explicitly or implicitly, perceived power or an analysis of power and its effects, as integral to the concepts of structure and community development.

In summary, this section has presented findings as a result of an initial examination of the data. Six observations were discussed about the ways in which practitioners think about the concept 'structure'. An analytical tool, in which concepts were qualified as parts of speech, was employed, showing that practitioners take a postmodernist interpretation of structure. They view structure not in fixed, static or one-dimensional terms, but in processual terms that have the capacity to increase their sense of agency. Interpretations of practitioners' responses also revealed four key categories, each of which are discussed in more detail in sections in the remainder of this chapter. They include:

1. Structures in society (5.3);
2. Power (5.4);
3. Agency (5.5);
4. Structuring community development work (5.6).

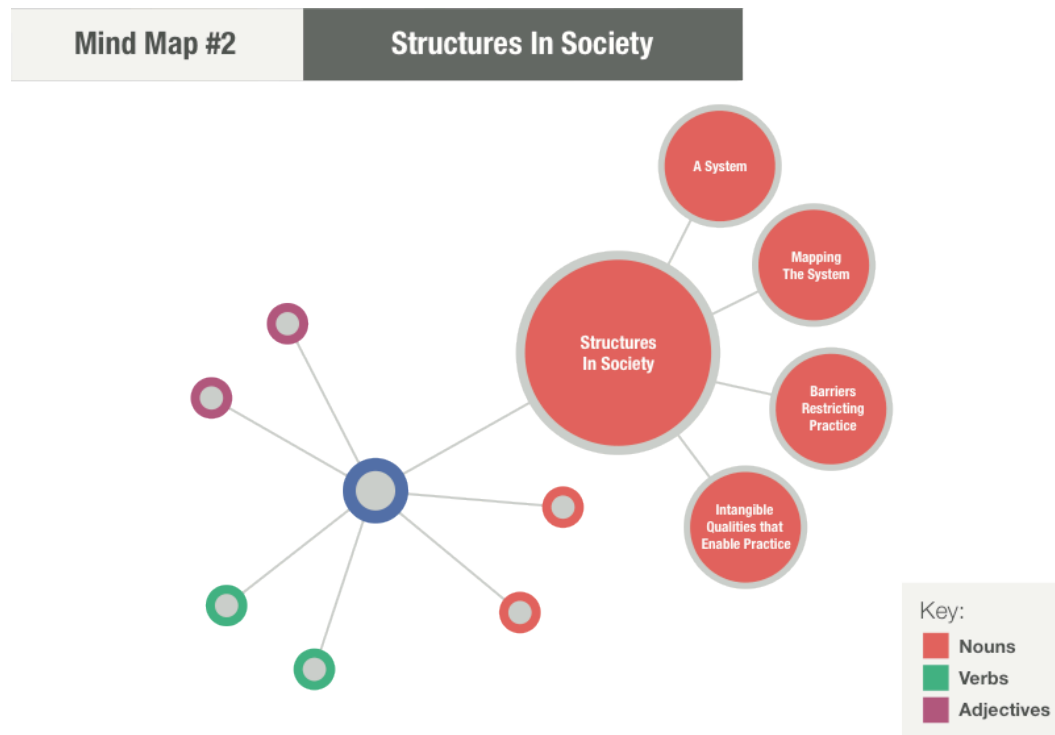
These sections have been ordered this way, based on consensus reached at Stage Two about a sequential process that takes place. This begins with a practitioner's structural analysis about power and extends to ways in which the work is undertaken.

5.3 Structures in Society

This section discusses structures in society, the first category created to discuss the concept of structure. See diagram below, (Figure 3), which is the same diagram introduced in 5.2,

however, it is focusing on the five themes that emerged from the data and categorised as relating to the noun ‘structures in society’.

Figure 3: Mind Map #2, Structures in Society



The following themes emerged from the data and are the perceived qualities of structures and their contexts that relate to community development practice. They include:

1. A system of organisational structures;
2. Mapping the system;
3. Organisational barriers that restrict practice;
4. Intangible organisational qualities that enable practice; and
5. Community development groups.

5.3.1. A System of Organisational Structures

In the following example, a rural practice context, Q4 has an analysis of structures in society as a system of organisational structures. The quote suggests a perception that this system is

complex and aspects of the system impact negatively on Indigenous Australians, who are the community members with whom Q4 works.

So the thought around all those words is ‘organisations’...community organisations, or other organisations, or entities or whatever...the Indigenous sphere is littered with organisations...It affects their framework (of practice) dramatically...a few people, actually the real grass-roots people, understand you can work outside of those organisations; but a lot of people think about ‘if you want to make any improvements, you’ve got to be working through an organisation, you’ve got to get funding and blah blah’. So the idea of structuring or structures around community work is... they’re like these skyscrapers, casting a shadow over the field (Q4).

Q4 clarified why working through formal organisations to make improvements in their communities is problematic for the people with whom he works. Q4 commented:

Well, they usually have these corporations, under the Aboriginal Corporations Act, sometimes they’re Associations, but anyway, they are all formalised, and they come from the Western legal system, and usually they’ve got a set of rules that people don’t understand, they weren’t involved in establishing them, and they don’t own them (Q4).

Q4’s example suggests a perception of formal organisations negatively affecting community members. The comment that only a minority of community members believe it is possible to work outside of established organisations is significant. It suggests a perception that community development may be more effective if it takes place outside of established organisations, as opposed to working within formal organisations.

Q4 perceives that creating and working through formalised organisations are the dominant ways known to mobilise and pursue particular goals. Only legal entities can apply for external funding so, to resource projects, community groups often legally formalise in the hope of attaining the necessary resources needed to carry out their purpose. Q4 also perceives that the governance arrangements associated with formal organisations are an impost that can cause confusion and lack of ownership for members of organisations.

Others also referred to complexity within the system of organisations. A strategy to “map” this system was discussed as way to manage the complexity and, also as a way to be achieve more effective outcomes from practice.

5.3.1.1 Mapping the System

Mapping the system of organisational structures is a way that practitioners make sense of the complex context in which their development work is practiced. The following two examples support this analysis. In this first example, V8 reveals a localised view of the mapping process. V8 works in an urban context, predominately with community members from culturally diverse backgrounds.

(We map) the strategy we are using...the accessibility to our target group. And who is the line, for example, for a community development worker, who is in *my* line, which organisation is on that level? So you have to know who is working in that level, and who is funding or resourcing your role or whatever that structure, and where do those resources come from....you have to have a strategy, you have to have a plan. From? To where? And what is the first step? Whom you talk to? What is the previous experience? And you just build on what already has been done. So that's the strategy (V8, original emphasis).

V8 spends time mapping out the structures and systems that form the context of work. An interpretation of V8's use of the term “my line” is about who is in V8's sphere of influence. V8 wants to influence processes primarily to gain access to a specific target group, people from culturally diverse backgrounds that could benefit from the family support V8's employing organisation offers. V8 also wants to work with other mainstream organisations whose services could be of benefit to the target group, but who may not be operating in culturally accessible ways, and therefore not realising their potential in relation to the target group.

Also working in an urban context, V5 also maps systems but, in the following example, V5 places emphasis on working at a social policy level, as opposed to a local level.

What comes to my mind is planning and policy. Looking at things from a very birds-eye view and seeing where things could be planned differently so that we can address disadvantage and address equity in a much better fashion. And so I see it very much from within ‘the system’ kind of view. So taking a panoramic view and saying ‘this is the lay of the land, can things be done better through policies and planning? (V5).

These two examples suggest an analysis in which it is essential to have knowledge about the systems and their associated processes. How these systems and processes impact on community members’ lives, and how they can be influenced or changed to ameliorate circumstances that cause disadvantage is at the forefront of practitioners’ thinking. Their analysis creates a base from which they make judgments about how to achieve the most effective results they can, and implement appropriate strategies accordingly.

This discussion suggests practitioners’ views about ways in which they work within the current system to benefit community members. The next sub-section discusses practitioners’ views about the organisations for whom they work, and the barriers to practice these organisations generate.

5.3.2 Organisational Barriers that Restrict Practice

When answering the prompt question on structure, three practitioners spoke about their employing organisations. In each case, they emphasised various challenges or barriers they face themselves (V2, V3 & V6), or their constituents’ face (V6), because of specific conditions generated within their employing organisation. V6 commented on the level of bureaucracy that she and her constituents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face when interacting with the organisation.

My current practice? Terrible. Forms, forms, forms, fill in a form to buy a pen....and that’s why it’s so hard sometimes for the community members to actually respond to that structuralisation, because if they ring for help, even if they get through, even if they understand what they need to do, for example, to book a hall, or a footy oval, there will be a form they need to fill in. The form is even confusing for me to fill out, let alone someone who is not speaking English well. So that’s one part of it. But also

jargon, exclusive kind of language, that's ok for you and me to negotiate, because we can imagine what that means, but for people who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, again it's a barrier (V6).

V6 is emphasising barriers for both her work as a practitioner and for the participants of community development activities when they interact with the organisation. Bureaucratic procedures confuse community members and prevent their ability to engage in community development processes that may improve situations for themselves or their communities.

Organisational conditions that are perceived as restricting practice are problematic because this can directly affect practitioner's motivation levels. Such barriers make it harder for practitioners to persist with what can be complex processes, or working with community members on issues of concern over extended periods of time. The three practitioners who raised these matters at interview all left their positions within months of participating in this study, taking up employment in areas of work outside the community development field.

However, organisational barriers that restrict practice do not have to be a de-motivating experience. The next section discusses one practitioner's view that barriers can also be opportunities for practice.

5.3.3 Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice

To this point, the structures in society have been imagined as tangible objects and often discussed as oppressive entities that cause disadvantage or barriers to people's participation in community development activities. However, one practitioner, V12, answered the initial interview question from a somewhat different perspective. Working in a rural context, V12's perception is that, although the context for practice can cause barriers for community members, it does not have to be an impediment to achieving goals.

I think of other words like "system", and I guess I'm quite visual, so I see the mechanics of things. Which could be small systems or small processes that happen, like even in a geographic area, or just on a micro-level wherever that might be. But also, other systems, which could be policies that are in place, or behaviour trends or

cultural values of where we live, or a local group, or an organisation. I guess I think of all the things that actually *seem* invisible that you come across. Where you hit a barrier, it's like an invisible wall, (and) you realise they're there sometimes because you don't expect them to be there. And then you hit up against them and you go 'oh, that's right, that's a boundary which I didn't know about', or 'I knew about it but I keep forgetting cause it's not obvious'. And some boundaries are stated in words, and you just learn 'ok, that's the boundary of that'. But I think there's a lot of boundaries that are there through innuendo or inference, which is where we have some flexibility as CD workers to go 'well, that isn't actually a policy' (V12, original emphasis).

V12 perceives "behaviour trends or cultural values" as intangible characteristics within organisations and communities. This suggests that these intangible characteristics create a type of fluidity with a system (Goodwin & Jasper 2004). For example, what is a behaviour trend now may not be in the future, as specific behaviours and culture vary over time. V12's emphasis on boundaries or barriers that exist "through innuendo or inference" relate to intangible characteristics which allow for flexibility and opportunities for practitioners to influence structures to benefit community members.

V12 was asked to provide an example to illustrate this analysis. V12 told a story of a social policy that assists migrants and refugees by providing English classes and childcare so they may more fully participate in Australian society. The English classes are delivered by one organisational entity and another delivers childcare services, supposedly to create access to the English classes. However, the associated organisational policies clash, resulting in significant barriers for the refugees with whom V12 works.

Later, during the telling of this story, V12 discussed other intangible elements within this system, various "loopholes" V12 looks for to create conditions where community members can take advantage of this social policy.

But there's sort of these loop holes, in such a small thing as getting someone to have their kids; and where that (childcare) centre can be; it's allowed to be a certain amount of time from someone's home; so things like that. It's almost like the policy is probably quite innocent, but either they (the policy makers) are aware or not aware of all the boundaries they've put there (V12).

This example illustrates V12's perception that, regardless of the social policy framer's intention to be helpful to migrants and refugees, there are unintended consequences making the policy ineffective. In this instance, the practical implementation of the social policy by two organisations delivering different aspects of the program is problematic. Both organisations have internal policies that make the overall aims of the social policy difficult to attain. As a community development practitioner with this structural analysis, V12 is looking to act upon the system and change it where possible.

To this point, structures in society have predominately been discussed as organisational structures. The final way practitioners discussed structures in society was as community development groups.

5.3.4. Community Development Groups

All participants discussed structure in terms of community development groups. They discussed groups in more instrumental terms, that is, ways of gathering people together around specific matters. The following example illustrates some of V2's work in an urban context, a population with a high cultural diversity. Forming groups and networks is a key feature of V2's practice.

I think if you bring people together and you talk for long enough, you always seem to come up with all these wonderful ideas. I do like groups. So often I'll email someone about one meeting and they'll say, 'which one's this?' Like, women who are on the Community Development Network, they're on the Vietnamese Advisory Group and they're also in the Women's Group (V2).

Participants also discussed groups in more analytical terms, that is, placing emphasis on the reasons why groups with which they work exist. The following example outlines the wide range of functions Q3 perceives community development groups have in society.

I think about creating new structures that can drive the agendas of people who have been excluded by existing structures. I think about legitimacy in the community,

moving from ‘a group of people who have cups of tea, speaking about an issue’ to ‘a group of people who have a mandate that works through a process that’s an acceptable political process’. It’s about mandate-building, developing mandates for moving on, for actioning ideas (Q3).

Q3 perceives community development groups as vehicles to drive particular agendas, specifically as a remedy for exclusion, a recurring theme throughout the interviews. In this example, Q3 suggests that community development groups can act upon the structures in society that oppress, through an “acceptable political process”, one that takes place when they mobilise around issues of common concern.

In summary, practitioners view structure as structures in society that fit within a system. Structure was also viewed in terms of barriers to practice and intangible factors that can be used to enhance practice. Some of the discussion so far has highlighted an analysis that emphasises *practitioners’* ability to understand the system, how it works and any advantages or disadvantages this might have for community members. Q3’s focus is on *community members* having this analysis of the system and their ability to act upon it collectively. The significance of having these types of analyses is discussed further in the next section on power.

5.4 Power

This section discusses power, the second category created to discuss the concept of structure.

Six Queensland practitioners explicitly talked about power from the perspective of structures or systems that hold power and how associated outcomes disadvantage community members. A common feature of these six practitioners as a group is their training in community development at the same tertiary institution. Despite their lengthy years of practice, the median being 28 years, and what must have been a myriad of influences on their practice over that time period, all have retained the importance of power and having a power analysis.

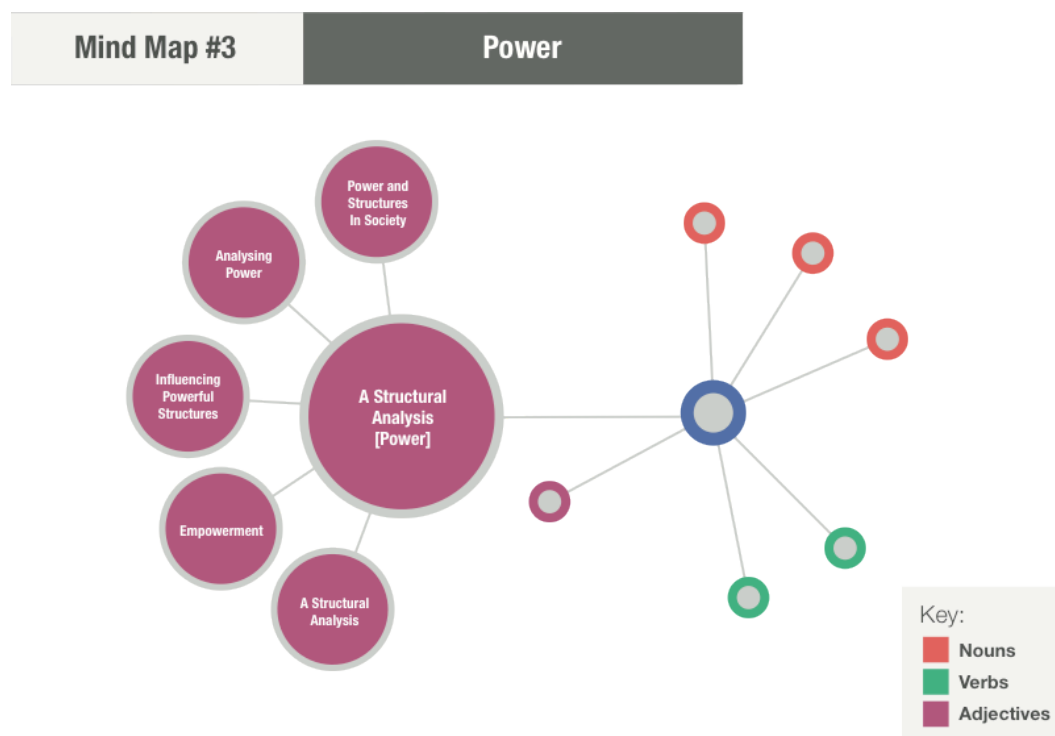
Furthermore, at the Queensland consensus conference meeting, two other Queensland practitioners, also recipients of the same training, joined with four people from this group of

six discussed above. At the meeting, they developed a shared analysis about the significance of practitioners having a structural analysis as *central or integral* to practice. What constitutes a structural analysis is discussed in the last part of this section.

Of the 14 others who had a more implicit understanding of power, four were Queenslanders and ten Victorians. These responses included ideas about structures in society, societal hegemony (Gramsci 1971), the power that practitioners themselves exercise and the concept of empowerment.

The remainder of this section discusses a range of key ways practitioners perceived the concept of power as it relates to community development. See diagram below, (Figure 4), which is the same diagram introduced in 5.2, however, it is focusing on the five themes that emerged from the data and is categorised as relating to the adjective, ‘a structural analysis’.

Figure 4: Mind Map #3, Power



The following themes emerged from the data and are practitioners' perceptions of power and community development. They include:

1. Power and structures in society;
2. Analysing power;
3. Influencing powerful structures;
4. Empowerment; and
5. A structural analysis.

5.4.1 Power and Structures in Society

Fourteen practitioners perceived structures as a cause of oppression in society, impacting negatively on some groups of people. The following example illustrates this perception:

Depending on whatever the power that structure has, or the systems that structure has, will then determine for each person if they can actually navigate that structure....a system, the way it is set up, can replicate disadvantage, so that certain people, because of that structure, definitely will be more disadvantaged, or have more difficulty trying to get any benefits, than other people (Q1).

When asked, Q1, who works with migrants and refugees in a regional area, provided a specific example related to this perception of structures, which have a negative impact:

It depends on the area that the policy or structure is in. For example, all the immigration policy...different kinds of visas.... it's just so complex...it's such a crazy system and I think that's quite frustrating. Something like that has made me really think about discrimination....I feel like a system like that is absolutely, fundamentally flawed (Q1).

The stories Q1 told at interview were of migrants and refugees who daily face many barriers to employment, education and participation in civil society (Cox 1995; Kenny 2011) because of bureaucratic structures and their associated laws and social policies.

Another practitioner's perception of power and structures in society comes from a somewhat different perspective. Q10 perceives *all* structures, including community development groups, as possible sites in which oppression can occur.

However, every structure is a place of contest. While we may be trying to develop structures that create the space to maximise people's power over their own decision-making processes, and we may try to cooperate with other groups and organisations that are developing similar structures, we live in a global political economy that co-opts all structures and uses them for their own vested interests. They may use the language of co-operation but they actually co-opt. And they use this specifically to oppress and exploit and manipulate (Q10).

Q10's perception about the potential of any groups to be inadvertently oppressive suggests it is important for groups to have the ability to analyse a range of power dynamics. They need to analyse power dynamics, both those within their own group and those emanating from structures within social systems which impact on them.

This section discussed practitioners' perception that all structures in society have the potential to oppress. Therefore, the ability of practitioners and community members to analyse power becomes significant. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

5.4.2 Analysing Power

Having the ability to analyse power, which may include who holds power and how that power is exercised, was perceived as an important component of community development. From the data, analysing power was seen in terms of practitioner analysis and community-member analysis. The following example comes from the perspective of *practitioners* having the ability to make these analyses.

I go to a bit of a power model fairly quickly, of who makes the decisions, what sort of powers they have, how you can influence that process for a fair deal for all. And stand with people who are the least able to participate or the most vulnerable and work with them, and work with the structures that exist. So, it's usually different

levels of government, but it might not be. It may be a doctor in a medical centre who is very controlling about their practice and what they will do and won't do with their patients. It may be the hospital system, it may be Centrelink², different Government departments who have power over people's lives (Q7).

In contrast to this perspective above, Q5's perception is that it is important for *community members* to have an analysis of power themselves, particularly if they are disadvantaged in some way and believe their situation is because of some failure at a personal level.

Often marginalised people...will blame themselves and/or others for their situation, not the structures that are actually impacting upon their lives. So helping to build that analysis so people understand that when they're homeless, that isn't always *only* their fault. That there is a range of systems put in place within a public space that has failed them in some way. And building their understanding of that failure of those systems and the opportunities to highlight those failures and to bring about some change is really part of the work, part of community work as I see it (Q5, original emphasis).

These examples show two processes of analysis. The first is a practitioner's analysis of power and the second, as in Q5's example, represents community members' analysis of power, which Q5 believes results from processes facilitated by practitioners. This latter perspective can be interpreted as a consciousness-raising process, or "conscientisation". The term *conscientisation* refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive element of these realities (Freire 1970). Processes that raise the consciousness of a group regarding arbitrarily applied policies that overshadow their particular circumstances can be empowering for group members, especially when they make decisions to act against such oppression. This relates to the concept of 'false consciousness'. In Marxist and Freudian theory "false consciousness" is the process by which our seemingly in-control psyches might be subtly manipulated, to the point where our most private thoughts are dictated by structural processes (Mendleson 2010:300).

² Centrelink is the federal government's organisation for delivering social security payments and services to Australians.

These ideas about community development enabling people's raised consciousness about structural processes were reflected in the data. For example, V10 highlighted how neighbourhood centres can be sites for such conversations.

There is the ideology of the ruling class, in any epoke. Marx said, and Gramsci talked about it as well, "how does that actually happen? What are the mechanisms? So it's things like the media, and politics and the church. And all those things that give us the same messages that just reinforce the status quo. I love that part of the work...having a cup of coffee and listening to conversations and introducing other perspectives into the conversations (V10).

Deneulin and McGregor (2009), when discussing 'wellbeing', provide a salient warning about false consciousness. They argue this is dangerous territory: when processes become paternalistic, and where 'superior' values and meanings, which arise from a higher authority or from a position of more enlightened understanding, discount or devalue the meanings and understandings that form the basis for poor people's decisions and actions (Deneulin & McGregor 2009). Drawing from Manfred Max-Neef's (1991) work on Human Scale Development, Deneulin and McGregor (2009) argue that reaching a certain state of being and freedom of choice might not always be good for the person or for society. Therefore, the ideas associated with consciousness-raising processes are important for community development. However, critiques of false consciousness suggest that these processes should not be engaged in uncritically.

To this point, the discussion has centered on structures in society holding and exercising power and the role community development practitioners play when analysing power and facilitating a power analysis with community members. The next section discusses the extent to which community development can influence powerful structures so people from particular groups in society are not automatically disadvantaged by the policies of those structures.

5.4.3. Influencing Powerful Structures

Community development processes are used to provide a voice for particular groups in society, with the aim of influencing powerful structures about the impact they have. In the following example, Q8's perception is that the impact of policies on some groups in society is not automatically recognised.

...supporting a small group so they can work within those structures. A structure of their own, which then gives them some power and authority and a chance for their voice to be heard (Q8).

Q8's aim is for a group's voice to be heard and therefore influence structures that oppress. Yet hearing a group's perspective does not guarantee a particular policy or stance will be changed. Q3's complementary perspective emphasises the perception that for a group's viewpoint to be heard and to increase the chances of that group influencing a more powerful structure, they may need to band together with others to increase their power.

It's quite difficult for unorganised groups to communicate with organised groups, so structure can elevate an issue through the structuring of it. So like-structure can talk to like-structure, because individuals and little groups can be excluded from those types of discussions. And sometimes it's really important to have some sort of collaboration, or association so you can have clout³. So you make an association with a group that's got clout...it's realising power, as well as fighting for power, stepping into power (Q3).

Influencing powerful structures was explored further at interview when the question was asked, "Have you been involved in processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of a community development process in which you've participated?" Eight participants said "no", discussing their perception about the barriers to this work. A further nine said, "yes", with four of those giving a very clear example of how this had occurred. Another five participants showed ambivalence when answering, for example, replying "no", and then giving an illustration of where it *had* occurred, commenting that the process was not entirely successful or achievements had regressed over time. Some

³ A colloquialism referring to having influence.

comments from this latter group include, “I’d like to say yes, but it’s really difficult” (V5); or, “to a degree...there’s always more struggle”(Q1); or, “very seldom” (V11).

Despite the analysis that oppressive structures need to be transformed, and despite the analysis that community development can influence powerful structures, these practitioners’ perceptions of success in this endeavour are relatively low. This begs the question about the efficacy of community development as an approach when attempting to transform powerful structures. Other types of processes, for example, systemic advocacy or law reform, may be more effective strategies to complement community development in these endeavours. However, what seems clear from this discussion is that practitioners believe there is a pivotal role for community development to form relationships with people affected adversely by powerful structures and to engage in consciousness-raising processes about oppression. If collective actions through community development processes are undertaken as a result, and people’s agency is increased, these may be empowering for individuals and groups. Ways in which community development increases the power of subjugated groups is discussed further in the next sub-section.

5.4.4. Empowerment

Every practitioner told stories at interview of their perceptions of community members’ increased empowerment because of their involvement in community development, with 13 explicitly using the term. Others used phrases in place of the word that meant the same thing. For example, Q10 told a story of a person with an intellectual disability who was supported to connect with others in her community wanting to learn to read and write. Subsequently, by attaining resources, the group undertook a successful literacy and numeracy project. Q10 concluded the story with comments about how community development is empowering for individuals and encourages people to get involved in their communities.

You’re actually involved in a process that is helping that person to be in touch with their power, enhance their power, increase their capacity, to actually not just grow as a person, but in their capacity to engage, influence their society in very significant ways (Q10).

V12's comments below illustrate the type of analysis discussed in the previous section on influencing powerful structures. The following quote shows a link that can be made between the concepts, disadvantage, consciousness-raising and agency, resulting in people's empowerment.

People here have talked to me about the childcare issue; it's come up a lot. Then I explain in a simple, quick form, basically why it's working that way. So they've said, 'Well, we want more child care'. I've said, 'look, to get what you want, quickly, in the next say, year or two, it probably won't happen'. Like we'll be sitting here in ten years maybe, talking about the same thing. 'So if we want to look at another model, we might have to create something ourselves. One thing you could look at...we could get some funding and resources to employ some child care workers, and make our own child care program, to suit what you're talking about. But if you want the system to change, this is what is happening at the moment'. As soon as they get the information, they're more empowered to make a better decision. 'Ok, let's not fight that'. Or, it might be quite powerful if *they* choose to fight it, more than workers (V12, original emphasis).

This narrative is a continuation of V12's description of the social policy designed to assist migrants with English classes and childcare referred to earlier (Section 5.3.3 Intangible Organisational Qualities that Enable Practice). By suggesting a range of strategies to address migrants' need for childcare, V12 is facilitating a collective analysis among community members about how to proceed. V12's emphasis on "if *they* choose to fight it", suggests that citizen advocacy and action around particular issues can be more powerful or effective than if a worker or a group of workers engage in systemic advocacy or other worker-led strategies. Several practitioners discussed the idea that community development is more powerful when, as politicized citizens, people engage in their own direct action, particularly if that action is targeted towards politicians who have the ability to influence policies.

Both practitioner and community member structural analysis is important when looking to bring about social change. The next sub-section discusses particularities of having a structural analysis.

5.4.5. A Structural Analysis

As indicated in section 5.2, when provided with the four prompt words on structure, only one practitioner answered the question by talking about “a structural analysis”. In that case, the reference was about practitioners’ roles in facilitating community members’ structural analysis. Yet, given the emphasis practitioners placed on power as the cause of oppression, it can be interpreted that they believe undertaking a structural analysis (Ledwith 2011; Mullaly 2007) themselves is very important. Given the limited explicit data on this concept collected at interview, the findings paper written in preparation for Stage Two of the study *did not* speak to the idea that practitioners need to have a structural analysis to inform their work. When the question was asked at the Queensland group meeting, “Are there any major components of what you thought of as ‘structural community development’ missing from the paper?”, the paper’s lack of discussion about practitioners having a structural analysis was raised. QM3 described a number of connecting ideas:

So I see that linkage between...‘structural analysis’, to understand the disadvantage that’s created within the structures we live in, and how that relates to ‘relationship-building’. And how it relates to ‘participation’ and ‘decision-making’, and how that then relates to ‘change’ (QM3).

This perception, that a structural analysis needs to inform *all* the processes of community development and the type of social change being sought, became one of the subjects for discussion at the Queensland group meeting. The five other attendees responded to QM3’s comments by agreeing with QM3’s perception that a structural analysis is *integral* to their practice. QM7’s response illustrates the type of comments made at the meeting:

I think *it is* part of my practice to have an ongoing structural analysis...(and) there are certain things I look at in that. I do think I look at the political milieu we’re all hanging in, and interconnected in, because I think that informs so much of our every day living. And the way we relate to systems that are built into our society, to government, to how we think about the use of money, resources, what sort of access we have to organisations. I would be thinking about the social situation of the people I’m relating to, and what kind of impacts there are on their daily lives. There may be some structural disadvantage impacting on their daily lives (QM7, original emphasis).

After thirty minutes of discussion on this point, and to summarise this part of the group meeting, QM3 was asked to respond to all the comments made about the concept of having a structural analysis. The response was:

I think that was great conversation...I think what I've discovered from people's responses is that their ways of analysing what's going on is fundamental to their practice (many murmurs of agreement round the room). And it does *position them* in where they choose to work, what they choose to do. And I think the other thing that's coming out is, within that, you look for opportunities....which is the pragmatic thing..... 'what can you actually work on here?', which I suppose has always been the method. And we've got different environments and different constraints... but I think what is really clear after that discussion is that *it is* fundamental to the way people (work)...what they choose to work on, how they understand it. But, I think it hasn't come out in the paper (QM3, original emphasis).

QM3's comment, "which is the pragmatic thing", was made in response to one participant's earlier input. During that participant's turn to discuss the concept, they agreed that *they do have* a structural analysis, but they work in a context that is unsympathetic to this analysis, so *pragmatically*, they do whatever they can to achieve outcomes for the people with whom they work. Pragmatism pertains to the philosophic tradition that takes usefulness or workability, rather than a supposed objective truth, as the criterion for accepting ideas and judgments (Carlson 2012).

With regard to QM7's quote above, "the political milieu" comment can be interpreted as practitioners drawing conclusions from undertaking a structural analysis. An interpretation of a structural analysis is that it constituted by various lenses through which practitioners view both society, and their constituents' lives within society. At the Victorian group meeting, this was articulated as a *matrix* of lenses. This point emerged, for example, as a response to the question posed in the findings paper concerning the concept of 'class'. Social class was not discussed by *anyone* at interview and, because it is a concept found in the literature, a question for reflection about the relevance of the concept was posed in the findings paper. To illustrate the point about a matrix of lenses, VM4 commented at the group meeting:

One of the questions you posed in the paper was, do we not need to worry about 'class'? And I thought, 'of course we need to worry about 'class''. And one of the issues around some of that 'class' stuff is around the economic version of things. And I think 'class' cuts across 'culture' and 'culture' cuts across 'class' as well. And so I think you need to have the matrix of all of them (VM4).

Q1, at Stage Two, talks about the complexity that exists when undertaking such analyses:

I just think there are so many different areas and categories of contestation in the identity and culture realms that class is just one of many things (Q1, Stage Two).

Practitioners discussed a vast array of social realities they examine when making their analyses, including areas such as: health, housing, education, income, employment, culture and the impact of racism, violence, family and community life, identity and gender. As previously discussed, practitioners also look at how government policies and programs respond to these conditions. A structural analysis was also discussed as *intangible* qualities, the loopholes within these policy contexts. The particular lenses practitioners use to make their analysis are governed in part by their organisational context and their roles. Their individual framework of practice, which includes practice theories upon which they draw, their values, various sociological and political perspectives they hold about society, as well as their professional training, also informs their analysis.

Q1, at Stage Two made further comments about the various lenses:

Thinking about all those lenses, they are then acted out differently depending on time, person, situation, dynamics and location...so maybe that's where community workers are more complex about it. You can't just have an analysis of power in relation to gender and apply it across everything. We have to work with contradictory analyses at any one time. So, a postmodern structural analysis? (Q1, Stage Two).

Q1 is questioning whether their approach to analysis is a postmodern one. This suggests that Q1 believes there are multiplicities of identities (Shaw & Martin 2000; Ife & Tesoriero 2006) and forms of oppression to be acknowledged and worked with in emancipatory processes;

analyses that go beyond those with just a single focus. This study did not specifically investigate the single idea of ‘structural analysis’, so determining how many actual lenses, or how practitioners analyse through one or more lenses at a given time, is not clear in the data. However, from the points raised by practitioners when answering the interview questions around disadvantage, it was clear that the particular constituents with whom they work, or the particular issues presenting for a geographical locality in which they work, or these in combination, contribute significantly to their analysis about structural factors for people in those contexts.

The following example illustrates this. V9, whose community development work is part of an action-research project, is focusing on diabetes prevention with people from CALD backgrounds and Indigenous Australians. When asked why this project was established, V9 commented:

The background of why we are doing this is that the western suburbs of (capital city) have the highest diabetes incidence and prevalence, twice the national average. There are many diabetes education pathways, and our role is to coordinate all of that and to have a whole-of-approach into diabetes education...self-management (V9).

V9’s social analysis is around incidence and prevalence of a particular health condition. Issues about language barriers, employment, housing, and income support were also discussed in relation to this work. V9 applies a range of lenses when analysing the situation, all in the attainment of the overall goal, to reduce the negative effects of diabetes amongst particular groups of people. V9 is employing an action-research strategy so community members involved in this project can contribute to its development. They may also use the findings from the project to advance the knowledge base of the health promotion field.

The discussion on social class that took place at both group meetings suggests that analyses from various standpoints change over time, or become overshadowed by other analyses. The concept of class is a case in point because the term has slipped out of these practitioners’ lexicon. Various suggestions were made to explain this phenomenon, and below is one example:

First of all, I'm surprised, given who you interviewed, that the word 'class' didn't come up once. But on the other hand, I'm not surprised because it's actually *unfashionable*, and you know, you can attract a lot of ridicule if you use the word 'class' or 'classism', because people just label you as a 'commie' from the 60s or something. But...I see 'classism' *everywhere* in the work I do, and the structures of society. They're there. And we've kind of, in Australia, taken on this identity of egalitarianism, the 'classless' society; well, if you talk to some working class people slaving their guts out, and ask them if classism is alive, you know. But another aspect of this, is the consumerist society that is so everywhere. People I work with are so 'at the bottom', what is the impact of that society having on them. So this idea that.... class is for me just *all through* what we're doing, it's just not spoken about. Yeah, once you get into certain intellectual discourses, people just don't want to hear it (QM4, original emphasis).

Although the concept of class was not raised at any of the individual interviews, when the concept was made explicit at Stage Two, all participants stressed its importance. A critical stance regarding a structural analysis would suggest a more overt articulation of power and inequality. The literature indicates these kinds of analyses drive practitioners' thinking. (See for example, the sections from the literature review on Structural Critiques and Critical Community Development). However, the actual narratives indicated a far less explicit articulation of a structural analysis. The previous discussion on practitioners' structural analysis about power and inequality, and practice that has the potential to achieve structural or social change does seem to be a weaker, or less prominent aspect of participants' narratives. Oftentimes, the narratives indicated that practice has a localised focus and is about making the conditions of community members' lives more tolerable, as opposed to effecting more fundamental change so that people do not experience disadvantage by virtue of their gender, class, race, geographical living situation and so on. This discussion also suggests that, for community development to live up to its emancipatory potential, overt critical reflection on these ideas is essential. Ledwith (2011) argues that, in our contemporary globalised world where structural inequalities persist, it is necessary that much greater attention be paid to developing theory and skills to address these issues. It would seem a more thorough engagement with the literature that theorises practice from a critical perspective would be beneficial to participants in this study.

To summarise this section on power, over half of the cohort perceived structures in society as causing oppression. At the Queensland group meeting, consensus was reached that having a structural analysis about disadvantage should be central to all practice. Both group meetings and those who responded to the findings paper at Stage Two discussed a structural analysis in terms of it being multi-faceted, or seen through a matrix of lenses. The discussion on class suggested that various analyses wax and wane through time. All twenty-two practitioners had an analysis of empowering processes as an integral component of community development. Working in ways to ameliorate the negative consequences of power on particular groups by mobilising, strategising and influencing is, for the majority of the participants in this study, community development's *raison d'être*. However, a critical stance was also discussed by practitioners, one based on two ideas, firstly, that with power comes responsibility, and secondly, the realisation that *any* network or community development structure has the potential to oppress. A third critical discussion included what seems to be a lack of engagement with the critical theoretical literature around structural disadvantage and practice to effect structural change. This suggests that ongoing collective analysis processes are critical, as are processes to reflect on values, actions, strategies and goals. In the meantime, community development groups need to ensure they do not replicate the very oppression that instigated their mobilisation. Such action presupposes that people have a sense of 'agency', arguably an essential component of all community development. The following section discusses the concept 'agency'.

5.5 Agency

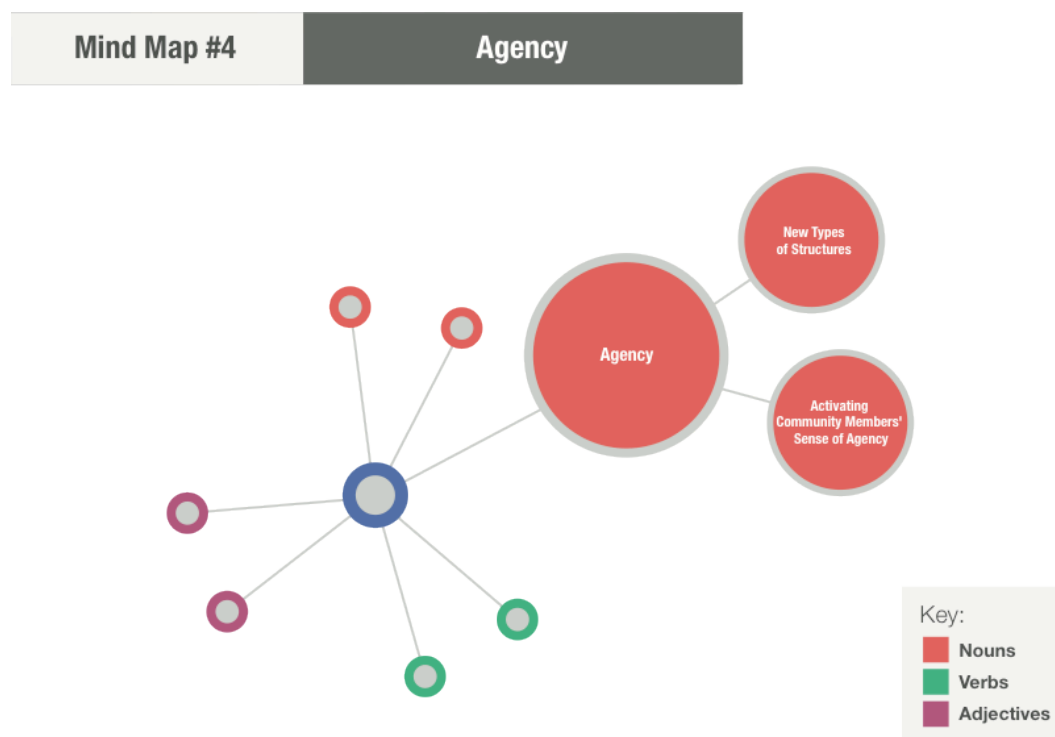
This section discusses agency and is the third category created to discuss the concept of structure. Agency is characterised as individuals who are autonomous, purposive and creative actors, capable of a degree of choice (Lister 2004). Another way the term is used in the literature pertains to the intentionality of actors, and their capacity to perform such action established through the agent's position within wider social relations (Connor 2011).

Concepts relating to these definitions were found in the data, although only one practitioner used the term 'agency' explicitly when answering the prompt interview question on structure. For others, agency was used implicitly to describe when community members become motivated to engage in community development activities. The narratives below illustrate

Lister's (2004) emphasis on agency and choice-making, and Connor's (2011) emphasis on agency and intentionality. The final narrative in this section makes a distinction between a personal sense of agency and a collective sense of agency, the work that takes place in the formative phase of community development work.

The diagram below, (Figure 5), is a visual representation of themes in the data about the noun, 'agency'. It is the same diagram introduced in 5.2, and focuses on two key concepts: that agency relates to the creation of 'new types of structures', and agency is about 'activating community members' sense of agency'.

Figure 5: Mind Map #4, Agency



V1, who had previously researched structure and agency theory, placed emphasis on agency as purposeful action to create new types of community development structures.

Well I'm a Giddens and Bourdieu boy...they've tried to understand the link between practice and theory and between agency and structure. And (V1's place of work) is also about evolving new structures; and these are a practice in our relationships

particularly, and even in our ways of thinking which create new structures. And that doesn't mean that then the old structures, the existing ways of being and relating, will just disappear. But what I find important is that we try out new ones, we experiment and hold that tension (V1).

V1 suggests that agency is exercised as “practices in our relationships”, and through “our ways of thinking”, which are signposts for purposeful ways to behave. V1 does not say exactly *what* the practices within relationship development might be or *how* a group should analyse situations, but V1 is drawing attention to these micro processes within groups. One interpretation of the importance of groups acting purposefully in these ways is so that groups can then *create* the conditions in which they want to operate. This highlights the importance of groups putting time and energy into reflecting on the quality of relationships they want and making explicit the kinds of analysis they are undertaking to strengthen processes and goals.

V1 does not think all “old structures” are of no value. However, when a group has put energy into thinking about how they want to relate to themselves and to others and, very importantly, how they want to be related to *by* others, then creating alternatives to existing structures and mechanisms may be a consequence of their analysis. This would be the case, particularly if existing structures and mechanisms do not honour qualities that the group believes are valuable. Therefore, they may find that creating new kinds of structures will best serve their purposes. In this sense, agency is about creating choices (Lister 2004).

It can also be seen that V1 is drawing attention to the place of experimentation and having the ability to hold in tension the contradictions in these processes. It is fair to say that dominant group behaviours are those that occur when more articulate, educated, financially resourced people have more influence over processes and, therefore, hold more power. V1's comments suggest that alternative ways of acting, where less powerful people contribute in ways that are meaningful to them, are somewhat antithetical to more traditional ways in which groups operate.

Community development practice that explicitly values alternative processes such as these may not always run smoothly or be comfortable for those involved. V1 is suggesting that a new paradigm is being forged with these processes. Some members may find such a

paradigm challenging, particularly if their analysis makes them conscious of a dominant or privileged status they may hold amongst the group.

In the following example, Q2 emphasises the dynamic nature of such structures. This perception can be seen as linking back to the postmodern theorising discussed in Section 5.1, about structures in society being pliable and able to be acted upon. Furthermore, Q2's emphasis is on community development being about relationship development, but supported by a good structure to enable those processes.

People who resist this idea of structure, I think, are inclined to see structures as something which is set and rigid and then you have to either kick it over, or blow it up to change it. But, working with systems, systems are also dynamic...basically through it all, there needs to be a balance of particle and flow. So, there's a good relationship between relationships and structures. The relationships are *well held* by a good structure and a good *overt* structure. So you can say, 'now, this is what I'm seeing that we're doing here...this is where we started, this is what we're doing now, this is where we're heading, is that how it is for you?'

The emphasis on a "good overt structure" relates to the definition of agency being about intentionality (Connor 2011). During the same narrative, Q2 talked about intentional processes to assist members of groups to become motivated and stay motivated in community development.

It's sort of a gathering in of the threads and a consolidating and a naming of where things are, and taking the time to do that so that people are *well collected*, and then, there's *the flowing out* of the next phase. It means that, from that place, everybody's got a good common understanding, people can move forth and feel validated and empowered to use their ingenuity and creativity and then bring it back (to the group) (Q2, original emphasis).

This narrative suggests Q2 has an implicit understanding that when people are "well collected" and that there is a "common understanding" amongst the group, they have agency. Significantly, qualities of action being described are those that foster ingenuity and creativity, arguably essential when seen in light of previous discussion on oppression and community

development attempts to redress oppression. This narrative also suggests these processes are personally motivating and have a self-propelling action. Q2's comment, that there is a "flowing out to the next phase" suggests that, when progress is transparent and acknowledged by members, these are sustaining processes for the group.

Sustaining group processes in community development is one thing, but freeing people's potential to act necessarily comes first. Q2 makes reference to people feeling "validated", "empowered" and can "use their ingenuity" and "creativity" when involved in community development. These could be interpreted as qualities associated with a personal sense of agency. However, practitioners often facilitate links from a *personal* sense of agency to a *collective* sense of agency. This is illustrated by Q9's discussion of the vision for a youth space in which Q9 works:

And all of what we've just talked about is a story about young people as a marginalised group...not just finding 'a space', but finding 'a base' by working together and articulating a voice together. So, we call this a "youth space" publicly, but we talk about it as a 'base', it's what we do, we provide a base for young people to come, and meet, and connect and find their ground here, find their feet, find whatever it is and go out and do stuff (Q9).

To conclude, structure can be viewed in terms of agency and can be seen as a necessary component for community development involving a range of processes. It has been suggested that creating structures and processes that enable and validate people's participation fosters their creativity and generates choices. Collective processes are seen as valid ways for individuals to work together on matters of concern, particularly when those concerns require a united and sustained commitment to action. A sustained commitment to action becomes the central idea when structuring community development work, and this is discussed in the next section.

5.6 Structuring Community Development Work

This section discusses the final way practitioners perceived the concept of structure, that is, the process of *structuring* their work. The actual term 'structuring' is not one readily seen in

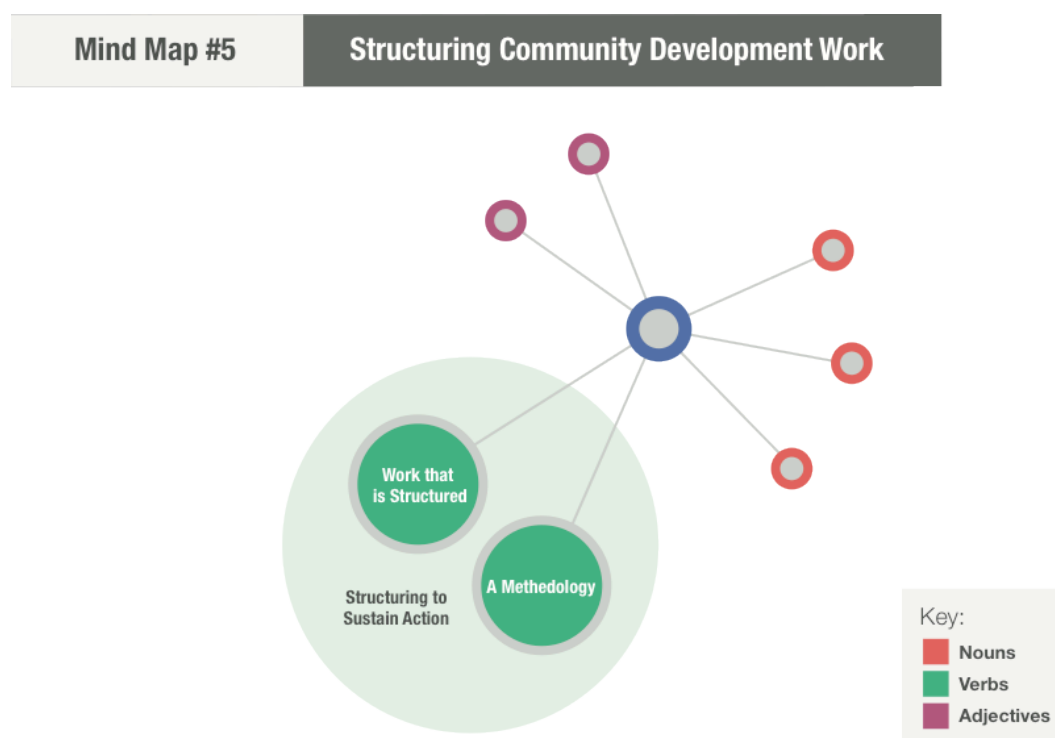
the community development literature. Some of the Queensland practitioners in this study used the specific term because of its association with a particular methodology of practice in which they have been trained. The processes of structuring community development are used more euphemistically, generally associated with broader terms such as how a practitioner organises their work, that is, the many and varied ways practitioners go about their daily practice. This section discusses ideas associated with structuring practice, and also the idea that practice is enacted at various societal levels.

Ten practitioners talked about structure as the ‘how to’ of doing community development work and mostly discussed micro-skills associated with group formation activities. For example:

There’s structuring of the work itself, at a relationship level, around the issues...so forming a group of people who will act to bring about change (Q5).

See diagram below, (Figure 6), which is a visual representation of the themes in the data. Like the previous mind maps, it is the same diagram that was introduced in 5.2. However, in Mind Map # 1, The Idea of ‘Structure’, the verbs included the concepts: *Work that is Structured* and *A Methodology*. *Structuring* community development is the broader concept, and is used to discuss how practitioners organise their work. Of those practitioners who discussed structure this way, one practitioner provided an exception to the others, particularly emphasising structuring as a way to sustain action.

Figure 6: Mind Map #5, Structuring Community Development Work



Q9 spoke about structuring as a way to ensure group activities are sustained over time, particularly when a longer-term strategy is needed:

Well, the word that comes to mind is something about “sustainability”. So it’s not the word, it’s the idea, that *structuring is about sustainability* (Q9, original emphasis).

Q9 provided an example of a piece of work which involved a complex structuring arrangement. The work centered on helping young people in a high school who were experiencing high levels of inter-cultural conflict. The key players in the structured arrangement included a local government youth worker, theatre arts workers, the principal of the high school and an academic who was providing support through rigorous evaluation of the project. Two years in, the project is achieving good results and has seen a marked reduction in inter-cultural conflict within the student body, as well as a marked reduction in the number of exclusions and suspensions from the school. When asked about why this structuring process was used, Q9 commented,

It is so we can have the right people involved in it; and they can have the right level of control. So to preserve the integrity of that collective of those five key people who came together and had a vision, we've needed to maintain a structure that left the authority to make decisions with that group, collectively. We, (the local government, Q9's employer), realised if we messed with that, we would be messing with the potential of the project to deliver (Q9).

Q9's comments indicate that the "potential" of the project is to give every chance for young people to get an education and advance their lives without degenerative inter-cultural conflict at school. Q9 is talking about how structuring this piece of work ensured the power and control over decisions made remained with the people directly involved in the project.

To achieve results, the local government needed to provide significant resources to establish the arts workers and develop the program. The results have been remarkable. The group had the foresight to formally evaluate the project as they went along, to both learn from processes and improve on outcomes. If the program was successful, the evaluation evidence could be used to argue for further resources and sustain the project in an ongoing way. That occurred as Council slowly withdrew its resources and Education Queensland took on the financial resourcing for the project, once it was proven to achieve results.

This is a good example of structuring community development work. Two structures, a local government entity and a state education department, were both influenced as a result of the community development work. They changed their regular policies and procedures, they provided resources, and they devolved power for making decisions to the project group, thus significantly benefiting community members, the young people from culturally diverse backgrounds attending the high school. In this case, this kind of malleability and flexibility is exactly the kind of remedial action practitioners thought was needed, when they discussed how systems and structures disadvantage some groups in society because of fixed and universal policies.

In summary, this section has discussed that structuring is generally about the 'how to' of community development. The high school example has shown that the group members' analysis was about a longer-term commitment being required to redress a severe problem. How to resource and sustain the project formed part of the analysis and structuring process.

This emphasis on structuring is one approach, and other approaches to structuring are discussed in Chapter Six, Methods for Structural Community Development.

Finally, another important distinction can be made about how practitioners answered the interview question on structure. This concerns societal structures and the levels at which they are located. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

5.6.1 The Societal Levels at which Practice is Enacted

Sites for practice discussed by participants were located at a *local level*, a *societal level* or *both*. Six participants described practice with community members at a local level. This is not surprising, given that geographic localities where people live and work often become the originating sites for community development.

However, 16 others described practice at both local *and* societal levels. This can be interpreted as them having a structural analysis along the dimensions discussed in section 5.4.5. Having an analysis of power, particularly power that oppresses and the source of that power, informs where practitioners undertake their work. The following example demonstrates V10's analysis about oppression and links to methodology:

I'll start with "structural"...I think of 'structural community development practice'. That we're working with structures within society for change *within* structures of society. And I guess formal and informal structures in society. And for me, they're structures that cause people to be disadvantaged in some way. So structures that create inequity within society. If we're talking about "structured" practice, well then I start to think about the way in which I would go about my job. So for me, that's more pragmatic, methodological type stuff, 'have I got a clear way of working, goals, processes, steps? (V10, original emphasis).

V10 is linking a clear goal, to reduce inequity within society, with the need to have clear ways of structuring the work to achieve that goal. Not all practitioners interviewed thought this way. For example, this topic came up at the interview with V3, where work was

discussed mainly at the local level, yet a structural analysis was being alluded to during the interview. To seek clarification, V3 was asked:

So you didn't want to speak to the 'structuring the work' question...you've alluded to it a lot, that you see the need for it, partnering and so forth, but you tend to focus on local, grassroots, group level work? (Researcher).

Yeah, I'm not political...I see some CD workers who are fantastic about being very political about their work; making these incredible changes in state and local and federal government. CD workers who've run campaigns to get better funding for the sector, and they're very good at that. Or people who've come up with these incredible funding structures and funding programs, because that's the way they think. They think in a really broad structural way. I don't think like that, I always think in terms of this, local. Always. Part of me would like to go 'yeah, I could do that', but...it doesn't interest me to think like that (V3).

V3 is discussing the idea of being "political" or political engagement as an area of practice that does not interest V3. However, as an element of 'structural community development', political engagement seems to be a critical factor. This was discussed at both group meetings. At the Queensland meeting, it was referred to as "micro-macro linkages" (QM3), and at the Victorian meeting, political engagement was described in terms of a federation of networks (Gilchrist 2009). Members of the Victorian neighbourhood house sector, at that meeting, talked about how creating a federation of networks has generated a greater political voice, particularly at state and national levels, about issues affecting neighbourhood houses and their constituents. This story is told in Chapter Six.

Practitioners apply a range of lenses to analyse power, and how that power disadvantages particular groups within society. The resulting analysis determines the degree to which practitioners engage politically with structures in society. The extent to which practitioners are prepared to engage politically varies greatly, as do conditions that detract from these processes. For instance, Kenny (2002) argued the 'charity'; 'welfare state' and 'market' discourses heavily compete with the 'activist' discourse, whose aim is for structural change and the redistribution of resources. However, the point made by V10, that a structural analysis directly informs how work is structured, suggests that engagement with the

structures in society that oppress *is how* community development can bring about social change.

It was discussed earlier that practitioners struggled to answer the interview question about evidence of powerful structures being transformed because of community development, that is, processes where community members are integral to the development work. This line of thinking has synergies with the concept of social movements, which Ledwith (2011:199) equates with the politics of protest or dissent. Three practitioners, V1, V4 and V10, referred to social movements when answering this question, naming, for example, “the ANHLC⁴ campaign” (V4; V10), referred to earlier in relation to a federation of networks; “Rural Australians for Refugees” (V10); and “the Zapatista movement in Mexico” (V1). Others made passing reference to the feminist movement of the 1970s and the disability rights movement. However, the paucity of recent examples was stark. At the Queensland group meeting, this was discussed:

It relates to how sophisticated this new world we live in has become at dealing with social movements with groups of people now. I look back over my...30 years...the sorts of activities that I’ve been involved in, you just could never do them in the same way now as you did them twenty years ago, because the *sophistication* of the systems that we’re working with in terms of how to *squash* local people, how to squash the individual (QM3).

There was resounding agreement with QM3’s analysis that people have become depoliticized by sophisticated systems that suppress their motivation or ability to participate in change-oriented processes, such as social movements. It has been suggested previously that community development processes can be empowering for community members. However, this discussion suggests that, at other times, working towards change can also be overwhelming. These concepts about politicisation and depolicisation are discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight. However, this discussion on levels across society in which community development takes places shows that practitioners are thinking about and making links between micro and macro/structural levels, particularly as these relate to their analysis about oppression and disadvantage.

⁴ Australian Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to look at the concepts of structure and community development found in the data, particularly how practitioners think about these inter-related concepts. Practitioners analyse structure as having knowledge of structures in society, the system in which practice is located and how these impact on the lives of their constituents. By applying a structural analysis, one through which they examine power through a range of lenses, they look at the barriers and opportunities to influence those structures. Practitioners work with community development groups to facilitate collective agency, and so group members can address matters of concern. Collective agency comes about when members of community development groups have a structural analysis, and it has been discussed that there are degrees to which they engage politically to bring about social change. However, despite the small number of narratives about structural change, a number of practitioners articulated a range of approaches they are undertaking to carry out their objectives. These will be explored in the next chapter on methods for structural community development.

CHAPTER SIX: Exploring Practitioner's Methods for Structural Community Development

6.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter discussed the way practitioners analyse the concept of 'structure', this chapter turns to the practical implications of that analysis. This chapter addresses the second research question: "How do practitioners put this understanding about structure and community development into practice"? It examines the approaches practitioners said they are taking in their work. Given the frameworks they have developed, they were encouraged to explore processes they use to structure their work.

The following statement and key question were posed about structuring, and this was the catalyst for their responses. While their responses to this question were pivotal to analysing this aspect of practice, data about practice approaches from other parts of the interviews is included in the following analysis.

There are so many different ways that development workers utilise structures, or structure the work (groups, organisations, regional bodies etc.) to assist with the ongoing management of processes or to help sustain that work. Q: How have you structured some of the work you do – particularly ways that you consider have been helpful or innovative to achieving the aims of that work? (Researcher)

There was a vast difference in the word length of practitioners' answers. The shortest response was 164 words and the longest was 1669 words. 930 was the median number of words in response to the question, demonstrating that the majority of practitioners had detailed responses or stories to illustrate their approaches to practice.

The remainder of this chapter is set out in five sections. The next section introduces two key concepts relating to practitioners' focus of work. The first concept is that community

development work takes place at different levels in society, either at the local level or beyond the local level. The former is where practice is located within geographic communities, and is also referred to work on the horizontal plane of society. The latter, relates to practice that extends beyond the local level and may include connections made with governments, peak bodies or other organisational entities, and is also referred to as work located on the vertical plane of society. The second concept is that the work of practitioners can be seen as either led by community members, and is referred to as ‘bottom-up’ processes, or can be led by practitioners, which is referred to as ‘top-down’ processes.

The third section is a discussion on theory-action congruency. This discussion takes place because the data revealed a number of incongruities between practitioners’ responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work, and the stories they told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose.

The fourth, fifth and sixth sections are presented by telling eleven stories of practice. Each section reflects the combination of concepts introduced above, that is, work at the local level or beyond the local level, and, work that is community member-led or practitioner-led.

Implications arising from these discussions show that practitioners view the collective approaches of community development as vehicles for political engagement. They believe these approaches ensure that the views of people not normally considered by powerful structures can have greater political impact. The discussion also reveals that there is no single approach or method to engage in this work, however practitioners believe that having clear goals, an ability to analyse a changing environment and an ability to adapt to new environments, are crucial elements for effective practice.

6.2 Focus of Work

When interpreting practitioners’ responses to questions about how they practice, three categories were identified and are introduced below.

Structuring local level work. Eight practitioners engage in community development work located primarily at the local level, with groups of people affected by issues of disadvantage.

Structuring for these practitioners includes a range of processes to advance groups' aims. 'Local level' work is defined here as community development work that takes place in bounded geographic communities across Australia.

Structuring work at two levels, local and beyond the local level, and where distinct connections with community members are deliberately made between the two levels. Five practitioners are working at a local level and structure their work beyond the local level. They are attempting to make distinct connections between work at both levels by involving community members in the majority of processes. Structuring for these practitioners means community members are involved, as far as possible, in citizen-led processes. Work that takes place 'beyond the local level' is defined here as work that crosses a bounded area. For example, this includes work beyond a singular geographic community into areas with a greater geographical boundary, such as a region or a state of Australia. Work beyond the local level can also be defined here as work that takes place in other realms, for example, work with representative bodies of issue-specific groups and organisations (peak bodies), or work with a range of stakeholders, including government, around a particular social policy area.

Structuring work beyond the local level, and where practitioners primarily drive the work. Another group of nine practitioners work or have connections at a local level but also discussed other types of work enacted at levels beyond the local. For example, when working beyond the local level, they may shift their focus to encompass other strategies, such as policy advocacy work or networking with other practitioners. Structuring for practitioners doing policy advocacy work means they advocate for groups and issues *on behalf of* the people directly affected by those issues. Structuring for practitioners employing networking as the main approach means issues for network members are shared and decisions are taken to develop collective actions about those issues.

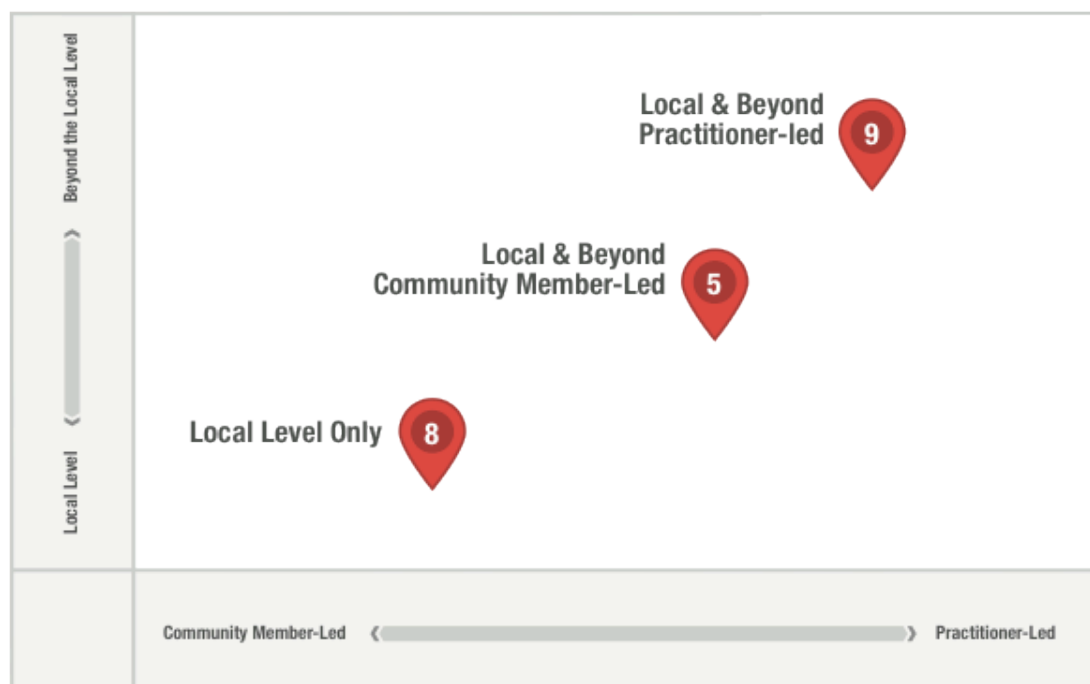
These categories draw from practitioners' narratives linking their structural analysis about power and disadvantage to ways in which they believe community development processes can be emancipatory for vulnerable populations. At times, the narratives were similar, in terms of practitioners describing their practice approaches. Therefore, in each category, each practitioner's case is described, however only some stories about practice approaches have been highlighted, to particularly illustrate differences or exceptions.

Diagrammatically, the categories can be placed on two axes. Both axes are imagined as a continuum, see below, Figure 7: Focus of Work Map.

Axis 1 - Local Level and Beyond the Local Level. Local level practice is work located within geographic communities. Practice that extends beyond the local level may include connections made with governments; peak bodies or other organisational entities.

Axis 2 - Community Member-Led and Practitioner-Led. Practice that is led by community members *is driven by and includes people affected by the issues* inherent in the practice. Practice that is practitioner-led includes processes of advocacy *about* people affected by the issues.

Figure 7: Focus of Work Map



This map plots the three categories of practice, introduced above. As a visual representation of practice along the local and beyond the local axis the map shows eight practitioners focus on local-level work only and 14 practitioners focus on work at more than one level. For these 14, practice extends beyond the local level and is explicitly linked to their structural analysis about oppression and societal structures on the vertical plane; hence the location of this work

reflects their attempts to remedy forces of oppression at their source. As a visual representation of practice along the community member-led and practitioner-led axis, the map shows 13 practitioners engage in community development work driven by community members - the local-level group of eight and the group of five located in the centre of the map. The nine practitioners who engage in practitioner-led or practitioner-instigated processes are plotted on the map approximately two thirds along the continuum, as opposed to the extreme end of the continuum. This is because, in all these cases, there are links made with community members.

The map shows that no work is conducted at a local level that is practitioner-led (bottom right), and also shows no work conducted beyond the local level driven by community members (top left). Although this study is reporting data from only a small sample, these absences are unsurprising. Regarding the first absence (bottom right), it could be argued that work conducted at a local level and driven by practitioners is not community development, but various forms of service delivery conducted in communities. These services are conceived and planned for by a variety of social service practitioners who deliver services to community members for their benefit. Oftentimes, governments with a social analysis about issues in communities fund these types of services to address issues governments determine as a priority (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). This is opposed to community development work, which mostly draws on a community analysis (Lathouras 2010) originating from the people living in those communities about their specific needs. With the assistance of a community development worker, community members collectively work to address those needs.

Regarding the second absence (top left), community member-led action on the vertical plane would be more akin to various social movements involving citizen-advocacy processes about a broad range of issues in society (Kelly & Burkett 2005). These processes involve many people, usually across a vast area. In their entirety, they are beyond the realm of practice for an individual community development practitioner. For example, social movements could include internet-based citizen advocacy, coordinated by a central body to engage with members and lobby around particular social issues⁵. Other social movements could include more traditional processes, such as those that occurred in 2003 in Australia, where thousands

⁵ For example, in Australia, the not-for-profit organisation, "GET UP! Action for Australia", mobilises members to email parliamentarians, engage with the media, attend events and donate funds to support lobbying on various issues.

of people physically protested by joining demonstrations across the country in opposition to the federal government's commitment to the then imminent war in Iraq.

The remainder of this chapter explores the categories outlined above and represented in Figure 2: Focus of Work Map. The discussion will describe their distinguishing features as practice approaches for structural community development and some of the linkages that exist between them. Findings also emerged from the data regarding the differences between practitioners' espoused practice theory and practice-in-action (Argyris & Schön 1974), and this is discussed in the following section.

6.3 Theory-action Congruency

Argyris and Schön (1974) are concerned about the effectiveness of professional practice, suggesting competence is based on theories of action. By theories of action, they mean behaviour that one might adopt in any given situation, particularly in new situations. Theories of action include two concepts. Firstly, "espoused theories" are used to describe and justify behaviour (Argyris & Schön 1974:21-23). They tend to describe what a person thinks they should do, or how they think they actually behave. Secondly, "theories-in-use" guide behaviour and influence the capacity for learning. They capture what one actually does (Argyris & Schön 1974:37). Argyris and Schön argue that the more congruency there is between one's espoused theory and one's theory-in-use, the more effective a practitioner will be (Argyris & Schön 1974:23). Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either one's espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24).

The work of Donald Schön (1930-1997), theorising the concept of the reflective practitioner, has been highly influential in a range of professional fields, including Social Work (Taylor, in press). However, multiple and contradictory understandings of reflective practice vary considerably according to particular fields and intellectual traditions, and even within writings of a specific discipline (Finlay 2008). From the critical social science tradition, the following critique can be made of Schön's theorizing. Processes of reflection on practice without an analysis of unequal power relations in society can equate to an exercise of "benign introspection" (Taylor, in press, n.pag). Practitioners may have a goal to undertake their very

best practice and use processes of reflection to improve practice (Taylor, in press). At the same time, they may adopt a politically neutral stance, that is, a stance where an overt analysis of matters relating to power, hierarchy and domination within social structures are sidelined (Taylor, in press). Conversely, practitioners engaged in critical reflection will attend to discourse and social and political analysis, seeking to enable transformative social action and change (Finlay, 2008). Taylor (in press) argues that it is not enough for the individual practitioner to be self-aware or simply to add to their expertise and competence through the processes of reflection, as Schön theorised. Rather, practitioners need to view reflection as a way to wrestle with tensions that exist in contemporary practice and, at the same time, demonstrate a commitment to emancipatory politics (Taylor, in press).

Placing the lack of a critical theoretical emphasis on reflective practice aside, Schön's (1983) work on how practitioners think in action has become 'canonical', as it has identified ways in which professionals could become aware of their implicit knowledge and what they learn from their experience (Finlay 2008). Acknowledging that professional practice is complex, unpredictable and messy, Schön's theory posits that, in order to cope, practitioners need to do more than follow a set of procedures; they draw on both practical experience and theory as they think on their feet and improvise (Finlay 2008). Reflection-in action and on-action allows them to revise, modify and refine their expertise as they act, both intuitively and creatively (Finlay 2008).

Because the data revealed a number of incongruities when practitioners discussed responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work (espoused theory) and the stories told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose (theories-in-use), Argyris and Schön's theorising is pertinent to this study. To further this analysis, a specific question was asked about any tensions practitioners believe exist between what they would like to do in their work and what they believe they can practically do.

When examining the data, five factors emerged that could explain this lack of congruency. These factors can be applied to the whole cohort, having impact across all the contexts for practice. Participants discussed these factors as either having a positive or negative impact upon their practice.

- The practitioner's organisational base and its mandate at levels beyond the local or within the broader sector;
- The amount of infrastructure that exists or is created and used as vehicles to take agendas forward, and to influence;
- The extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work and have reasonable expectations about outcomes;
- The length of time it takes to effect change and their perseverance through lengthy processes;
- The extent to which practitioners have an 'experimental' or 'action-research' mindset, which allows them to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development.

According to participants' positive or negative narrative about these factors, the researcher allocated a Theory-Action congruency rating. This rating allocation included the following logic: to gain a "high" Theory-Action congruency rating, participants needed to speak positively about four or five of the possible five factors, the remainder, gained a "low" rating. These ratings about the five factors become important when discussing structural community development practice. These are discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. Narrowing the gap between practitioner aspiration and actual practice creates pathways for effective practice, which should ultimately benefit community members. The five factors, the ratings and their impact on practitioners' accounts of practice will be discussed within each of the categories in the remainder of this chapter.

6.4 Structuring Local Level Work

This section discusses eight practitioners' work, conducted predominately at the local level. They take an enabling or facilitative role with community members when structuring their community development work. This involves working with people to create groups, creating structures to sustain those groups, and also establishing group processes to advance issues across a defined geographic area. Within this section (6.4), a sub-group of practice emerged and does not reoccur in either of the other sections (6.5 or 6.6). A group of three practitioners (Q4, Q10, V1) engage in their community development practice voluntarily, that is, they primarily work *outside* the funded social service system and at the local level. The five

others in this section and the remainder of interviewees across the two other sections work *inside* the social service system. The ‘inside/outside the system’ distinction becomes relevant when considering autonomy, and the presence or absence of restrictions on practice that occur within funded social service contexts. This will be discussed later in this section.

Regarding the theory-action congruency of practitioners in this category, four practitioners - Q5, V2, V3 and V7 were seen as having low theory-action congruency. Four practitioners in this category were seen as having high theory-action congruency - Q4, Q10, V1 and V8. The three practitioners who work outside the social service system are part of this latter group. Examples of practice to illustrate various approaches for structural community development will be discussed in this order, commencing with those with *low congruency*, followed by those with *high congruency*.

Q5, with low theory-action congruency, provided a response to the question on structuring that could be considered an exception within this group of practitioners who work locally only. Q5 answered the question about structuring by discussing policy and planning arenas, although examples of structuring work into those arenas was not made clear, suggesting an aspiration about the potential these processes can bring, rather than actual engagement in them. I asked Q5 the question:

What led you to choose to structure something the ways you did? The response was:

Well I think more than anything, it was the set of relationships I had. I think and (have a) vision that ‘if we could structure the work up into other layers, that it will be more powerful than keeping it on the margins, at a local level’. That it needed more visibility, more capacity at the other levels. If you don’t have the relationships, then it’s almost impossible, it’s not gonna work. One of the challenges for me in a piece of work, is always to look at the power relationships and try to balance those in different ways, or change that power dimension, in some form; even if it’s really small (Q5).

The emphasis on the relationships Q5 has with people who hold structural power across those layers, is key to practice. To illustrate this, Q5 told a story of a piece of work where local people living with a mental illness and mental health clinicians and bureaucrats were brought together for a forum about mental health. Processes were facilitated where forum attendees

were able to hear the perspectives of all who were present. So called “top down wisdom and experience” (Ife 2010:30), from people trained and working professionally in the mental health field, was not privileged over the knowledge from people with lived experience of mental illness, thus equalizing power differentials between the various groups of people attending the forum. The outcomes of the forum included an appreciation for and new insights developed about the circumstances of people living with mental health issues and also the significant role of community work when responding to community members in these situations. This story illustrates that structure can be seen as a platform or space for conversation, one that can have an educative and liberating effect on those involved.

Putting aside this example of local forum work, Q5’s response to the question about structuring is an interesting case in point, where a practitioner’s analysis may be considered more *aspirational* in nature. Q5 has used words and phrases such as, “vision” and “if we could structure” in the response, words tentative about outcomes. Q5’s answer began with this analysis about structuring into other layers beyond the local, however the remainder of the answer told stories about local-level work only. This suggests a disconnection between the analysis of how to achieve goals and the actual outcomes, or it could also suggest the presence of other barriers preventing structuring efforts despite Q5’s analysis.

V7 discussed structural community development as processes in which community representatives acted on an “advisory committee”. In addition to working with local groups, V7 has created other mechanisms for community members’ involvement in processes that have a broader emphasis beyond those directly affecting members of an individual group. For example, the community members involved in these processes may simultaneously belong to a group that is issue-specific or have a single focus *and* be a member of another group that takes a broader perspective and develops actions about issues that may be common to a range of groups. Through these processes, the views of community members cross issue-specific or group-specific boundaries, and synergies are found to advance common concerns, increasing the political weight of these actions.

Two practitioners, V2 and V3, primarily focus on establishing groups or networks of local people to work together on issues of common concern. The following example, from V3, illustrates how a structural analysis about poverty and isolation is being redressed.

Story #1 Political Engagement through Small Enterprise Development

V3, with low theory-action congruency, has established a craft market to support local women to begin micro-businesses. The women have been out of the paid workforce for extended periods of time, often after years of caring for children at home full-time. V3's employing organisation takes responsibility as the legal auspice for the markets, enabling the women involved to support and learn from each other about how to establish micro-businesses and re-enter the paid workforce by earning an income. V3 discussed the community connectedness that has been built locally because of the markets and other "spin off effects", such as people learning to develop website blogs through which they display and sell their homemade merchandise, and also connect with other people interested in crafts worldwide.

V3's response to the question on structuring, "I'm not political" quoted towards the end of the previous chapter suggests a view that political engagement is about working with governments or establishing new funding programs. Yet, from a feminist standpoint (Hyde 2005; Stepney & Popple 2008), V3's work does suggest a form of political action, women's political engagement primarily at a local level. The intersection of the personal or private concerns of women and their subsequent collective public action in this way suggests V3 is enabling women to increase their participation in society. By developing relationships with others in their local community, they are less isolated and local social capital is being built. By supporting each other to learn craft-making, marketing and business skills, they are increasing their income, creating pathways out of poverty. By developing website blogs, they are creating global connections with other women who have a passion for craftwork. When auspicing this work, V3's employing organisation is providing a legal framework to support the women, which means the women do not have to pay for their own public liability insurance and can experience ways to earn a living with fewer business establishment overheads. It could be argued that V3's structural analysis about poverty and isolation has led V3 to respond in ways that *are* political in nature.

The remainder of this section discusses approaches to structuring from the perspectives of those practitioners with high theory-action congruency, commencing with those who work outside the social services system, followed by the one practitioner who has high congruency and works within the social services system.

Stories # 2 and 3 – Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations

With two practitioners, Q4 and Q10, both with high theory-action congruency, voluntarily work with local groups has evolved to a point that formalising in some way has become part of the structuring process. Q4 told a story about work to establish a small community organisation, a project with an aim to provide Indigenous young people with opportunities for employment and cultural development.

It will be incorporated under the Association's Act, the simplest, minimalist organisation that can attract funding. This work will be a far more enabling process. I guess that's where my views around structure are tainted or affected; I see the impact on how (organizational maintenance) detracts people's attention. I just think it's a long-term process. If you go for structure too quickly it can affect the process too much, distract or whatever. So, I've been cautious, but I've also seen how necessary and important structure is. So, I'm not anti-structure, I'm just cautious (Q4).

Q4 was quoted in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.1) discussing 'structure' as 'a system of organisational structures'. Q4's example in that chapter suggested a perception that formal organisations negatively impact on community members because they follow the Western legal system, which have complicated rules people do not understand. Q4 also raised issues about a lack of ownership of organisational structures, suggesting a greater sense of ownership would be of benefit to people.

This quote above shows Q4 is working with community members to create a different kind of structure. The emphasis Q4 is placing here on the "simplest, minimalist organisation" is significant. Q4 seems to be suggesting that it is important to ensure that responsibilities of organisational maintenance do not overshadow the group's vision, hence Q4's emphasis on a "minimalist" structure. This analysis suggests there are hidden consequences of maintaining formal structures relative to the ease of initially establishing them. By not structuring "too

quickly”, Q4 seems to be suggesting that if the group has time to analyse all the factors associated with formalising, any possible negative consequences could be averted.

Q10, with high theory action congruency, was the other practitioner who spoke about formalising, but in this case, the decision was *not* to formalise. Q10 was quoted in Chapter Five discussing a process Q10 facilitated within a network of community members, all of whom tabled 40 agenda items for ideas of community projects they wanted to undertake. Twenty households of people are involved in this network, in a suburb in a major city. The network has been operating for 20 years. When answering the question on structuring, Q10 talked about an innovative approach this network has employed to form a legal entity that runs *parallel* to the network and which supports aspects of the network’s activities (Westoby, Hope-Simpson & Owen 2009).

Well one of the ways the Xantha Network⁶ has operated, is that we’ve decided to be a non-formal network in which we can emphasise inclusivity and mutuality. In order to do that, we’ve decided to *not* incorporate ourselves as an association, but to remain a non-formal network. But then, to develop a parallel organisation, that can be an auspice for any of the activities that people in our network want to do within a legal framework (Q10, original emphasis).

Q10’s emphasis on concepts such as “mutuality and inclusivity”, and to “remain a non-formal network” suggests that the group’s analysis was that formalising would have had negative consequences for the network. Setting up this arrangement of dual structures means that *some* members of the non-formal network are involved with *both* the activities of the network and the governance arrangements necessary to support those activities through the auspice association. There is a direct and formal link between the non-formal network, and the auspicing association. The link is based on relationships, mutual accountability and a vested interest in a range of community groups and their goals. Their model has been successful for over seventeen years and the association has auspiced over 100 projects in that time (Westoby & Dowling 2009)⁷.

⁶ Pseudonym name for the network

⁷ Westoby and Dowling (2009) discuss the story of this auspicing organisation as an example of “Structuring not Strangling”

From this discussion, therefore, despite the form that community development groups take to formalise and further their goals, three key points seem imperative. They include the quality of the relationships amongst those involved, an awareness of the risks associated with structuring and ways in which groups can mitigate against those risks.

Story # 4 Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action

In a similar vein, V1, also working on a voluntary basis and with high theory action-congruency, answered the question on structuring by telling the story of a non-trading co-operative developed by community members. In this case, the co-operative has become the infrastructure to support and enable a myriad of community development projects. V1 provided many examples of projects and activities that have been undertaken in the co-operative's 10-year history.

A distinguishing feature of this example of structuring is the co-operative's physical presence in the community. It is like a network, in the sense that its members have pathways in to connect with each other and engage in many different activities, and it has created a physical base where people can meet. As a result, many ad hoc or unplanned interactions occur because people visit the physical space. This cross-pollination across the physical space enables the conditions for community members to take unstructured opportunities to meet new people, build relationships and develop ideas for community building activities together. V1 articulates the co-operative's stance:

It is a gathering place where people can come and have good ideas. An incubation ground to translate them into practice (V1).

Both the examples discussed above, Q10's auspice association that supports the networks' activities and V1's co-operative demonstrate innovation when structuring community development. Over a substantial period of time, the people involved in these groups have collectively acted to create structures they can use to further their aims.

V8, the final practitioner in this category of practice at the local level only, like Q4, Q10 and V1, demonstrated high theory-action congruency. V8's approach to structuring community

development work is similar to others who form networks with local community members and form reference groups to guide work across areas affecting a range of groups in a particular locality. Whereas the others in this category who are working in the social services system had low theory-action congruency, V8's is high. V8 comes from a cultural background where community development work is seen more like a vocation, as opposed to a professional career. The following quote illustrates this:

I am already helping my community. Why not skill-up myself in this area? So that is why I moved to community development – it is (part of me) religiously, culturally, naturally, it all adds up. We don't have the word 'volunteers' in our dictionary, no (V8).

With the comment about "volunteers," V8 is referring to a culturally specific tradition of community service as something routinely undertaken in the V8's ethnic community. Volunteering for work implies choice, either to volunteer or not to volunteer. Therefore, although not used as a factor for considering theory-action congruency across the whole sample, a sense of *vocation* for community work is clearly central to V8's practice. Another possible factor for the high congruency rating is V8's own refugee background, which has instilled an attitude of optimism about taking every opportunity to build a new life in this country and build communities that will benefit all.

In summary, several key points about structuring emerged from this discussion. Firstly, local level community development provides opportunities for community members to engage politically through a variety of group work processes. Secondly, these processes include common features such as egalitarian relationships, developing a sense of mutuality amongst members and inclusion. Thirdly, vehicles are created and used to sustain projects, which people believe improve their communities. This includes various types of structures, demonstrating there is no *singular way* to create them. However, the fourth point is that, in the structuring process, particularly when new structures are being created, group members need to be conscious of the risks associated with different kinds of structured arrangements. The process of weighing up potential risks and benefits will ensure their collective values and goals are not overwhelmed by the realities of establishing and maintaining the actual structure.

Regarding the theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) of practitioners in this category, it has been shown that the organisational base for community development and how the base enables practitioners to be responsive to community members is critical. The three practitioners working outside the social service system are creating community-owned networks and organisations entirely responsive to the needs of the constituents associated with those networks and organisations. Compared with the others who practice within social service contexts, this group has fewer constraints imposed on their practice. For example, they can avoid constraints such as those an employer may make on an employee or constraints associated with funding contracts the employing organisation has, compelling the practitioner to work in particular ways. This suggests these three practitioners would have a strong sense of work autonomy and this could be a contributing factor for their high rating for espoused practice theory and theory-in-use congruency.

Although they have created or are creating organisational bases for themselves and the groups with which they work, compared with those located within the social services system, these types of entities could be considered as being on the 'fringe'. Organisations on the fringes have no less importance in the overall makeup of groups in society attempting to bring about social change. However, the question that begs to be asked as a result of this discussion is to what extent do practitioners, those with a sense of agency, have to be part of the social services system to effect structural change?

The next section discusses the type of practice, utilised by five practitioners, whose practice has joint aims: developing communities *and* changing the system.

6.5 Work at both levels, local and beyond, but where distinct connections with community members are deliberately made between the two.

Structuring for five practitioners, Q1, Q3, Q7, V5 and V9, means they are working at a local level and structure their work beyond the local level. They are attempting to make distinct connections between work at both levels by involving community members in the majority of processes. Structuring for these practitioners means community members are involved, as far as possible, in citizen-led processes. This group is also attempting to effect change within the

social service system or other systems through a range of strategies including participating in state-wide networks, building regional infrastructure and systems advocacy.

Compared with the practitioner's work discussed in sections 6.4 and 6.6, this was the most cohesive group regarding their theory-action congruency, which was high for all five. They have a structural analysis and are looking to influence processes where oppression originates. Their employing organisations are supportive of their work and structures have been created to carry forward agendas into realms beyond the local level. They have clear processes through which they are working, or if processes are not clear, they apply an action-research approach to experiment, then evaluate and try something new to attain desired goals.

Story # 5 – Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform

Q1, for the past four years, has worked at a local level to establish a range of community development groups with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. In addition, Q1 worked with a regional network comprised of both community members from culturally diverse backgrounds and practitioners who practice in the CALD field. For this same period, Q1 has also been integral to the development of a state-wide network of 22 community development workers and policy advocacy workers who aim to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees across Queensland. Therefore, Q1 is working at three levels – local geographic communities, regionally, and at a state-wide level.

A clear example of how the state-wide work has benefited community members was discussed in the interview. Q1 was involved in the formation a specific working group to reform the state government's social policy on the provision of free interpreter services for Queenslanders for whom English is not their first language. The process involved collecting stories from all over the state of significant disadvantage in areas such as health, housing, crime and violence that may have been prevented if free interpreter services had been available and language barriers removed. The working group lobbied the state government and the policy was changed.

Q1 emphasised just how pivotal the community development element of this process was to its success by commenting,

With that working group, I think community development was really important, that we were local; really, really important (Q1).

The community development processes included making connections with people affected by issues, hearing their stories and providing compelling evidence to feed into the social policy reform process.

However, despite this success story, Q1 was one of the practitioners who showed ambivalence when asked about ‘powerful structures being transformed because of community development’, discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.3). Q1’s quote in Chapter Five, “to a degree....there’s always more struggle”, related to this story about the access to interpreters campaign. The ongoing “struggle” now involves Q1’s work to keep the pressure on government departments to ensure the policy change continues to be established across all the relevant government programs, a large and slow process. By monitoring the implementation of the policy change, the state-wide network is ensuring the effectiveness of their social change work through the policy’s institutionalisation.

Therefore, in terms of structuring community development work, this example has shown how a locally-based practitioner has a structural analysis about a source of oppression for one group of people in society, people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The structuring work to reduce disadvantage for this group of community members has involved work at three levels, local, regional and state-wide work, and work with government and non-government groups or entities. The ongoing nature of this work, to institute change at both a policy level and at an operational level, is contributing to its sustainability. Community members’ experiences and aspirations, as well as their bilingual skills, have been integral components to this successful piece of work.

Story # 6 – Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work

Q7 told the story of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Solidarity group, comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. These people originally came together to inform themselves about racism and learn more about ATSI histories and

culture. For the past nine years, they have engaged in a range of projects with both relationship-development and educational aims. Q7 discussed a number of key features to structuring this work when answering the interview question.

I do believe in shared decision-making. I think that's really important for my work, to be informed by the people that the role exists for. I think that's fundamental, to listen to the people, to work with small groups of people around some of the issues that you might be seeking with them, to address the issues they're telling you about. The ATSI Solidarity group, while that got resourced by workers, it's become more and more independent as a group; sort of mutually resourcing the workers and the workers resourcing the group. They're the experts on their lives; they're the people who will know how an action will work. The group then started developing actions. There are people in the group who really focus on the action side, and there are people who come to connect and learn more too (Q7).

I asked Q7 if it was common practice to have a group that can hold a range of reasons why people may be participating, for example, in the Solidarity group, an orientation around *various actions* and an orientation around *building connections* and *education*. Q7 commented,

Sure, *that* group can (Q7, original emphasis).

Q7's narrative suggests several things about approaches to structuring. Firstly, that Q7 *facilitates* processes where members of the group deliberate together, arrive at a shared analysis and make decisions *as a group*, as opposed to a practitioner making decisions alone or with other practitioners, which is a different feature of other structuring practice discussed in the next section.

Secondly, although the group has developed a range of actions, pathways into the group are *not just* task or action-oriented. The group aims to keep creating connections with newcomers and has an emphasis on education and building strong relationships. It does this through its many activities in the wider community and their ongoing internal group discussions. This also suggests that the group is open enough to include new people and their ideas despite how sophisticated or developed the Solidarity group's actions have become.

This could also be a strategy for keeping the group energized and enhancing its ability to sustain itself over time, as new people and new energy have a replenishing effect on the group and its actions.

Thirdly, the group *makes connections with others beyond their locality* by forming bridges with people in society who also have an interest in Indigenous affairs. This indicates that the group has an analysis that there needs to be connections with groups and organisations outside their immediate sphere, perhaps to assist the group to further its own aims, or for the group to be an influence within those spheres. In this regard, Q7's story shows that community members are exposed to and gain experience in this aspect of structuring community development work, that is, bridging with organisations and institutions in society. They do this when, for example, members of the Solidarity group have opportunities to talk and build relationships with government bureaucrats, academics and others who represent diverse groups within the wider community.

Therefore, in terms of structuring community development, this example has shown how a practitioner with a structural analysis about racism and the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples is working to bring about social change. Personal connections between people are breaking down barriers across a range of historical divides. Also, people based in local communities and people based across institutions in society are together working towards justice and equality.

Story # 7 Building Regional Structure as a Vehicle to Reclaim a Developmental Agenda

Another Queensland practitioner in this category, Q3, told a story of work in the Community Housing sector, where Q3's current work involves establishing a community-based regional housing company. Q3's story discussed a time in social housing policy history where community development work with tenants living in community housing influenced and improved state government social housing policy. The following quote, however, harks back to that previous era because Q3 also discussed how housing social policy has significantly changed since that time. Q3 perceives that, driven by economic imperatives, the social housing policy context has now become more about getting a roof over people's heads than providing a stable home. The policies regarding eligibility for housing and allocation of

houses has become rigid, centralised and regulated. This system is currently constraining community-based housing service providers from working developmentally, that is, working responsively to community members' needs, as Q3 had been able to do in the past.

In the days when innovative practice was supported it was recognised that community-housing workers practiced in a certain way that was providing tenants with a whole lot more value adding than just a house...citizenship. The practice influenced the state about what makes for good housing provision, not just in the community-housing sector. But that's being rapidly deconstructed at the moment (Q3).

Q3 is lamenting the loss of a system that was once pivotal to working with the wider community to support the inclusion of more vulnerable community members - people who are homeless, or are at risk of homelessness. Because of this analysis about the shift in policy, Q3's current work has a vision "to build a community-owned regional company to deliver housing based on community development values and principles". Responding to the current political realities, Q3's structuring work now is two-fold: firstly, to create new infrastructure, a community-owned regional company that will carry weight and therefore be more influential in its advocacy work, and secondly, to be a vehicle to increase community housing tenants' participation in society and their citizenship.

Whereas the two previous examples in this section, from Q1 and Q7, involved the start of new work entirely from scratch, this example of structuring community development is reclaiming the developmental aspects of a previously successful system and working to modify something that already exists. Q3 is working regionally, forming a new housing company, a structure for advocacy; and working locally across the region through an existing community-based housing organisation. This organisation is providing housing that enables community members' to act as citizens in their communities, despite the circumstances that led them to need low-cost housing.

Two final practitioners in this category, V5 and V9, are also making explicit links with community members to advance issues in realms at a local level and beyond. V9's work was discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.5), the community development elements of a formal action-research project to prevent diabetes. V9 has set up an advisory group to provide input

into the project, with representatives drawn from a range of people, community members and professionals from various ethnic backgrounds and Indigenous Australians.

In a similar fashion, when working in a state-wide peak body, V5 sought representation from community members across the state to feed into social policy development and advocacy processes. In this case, V5 was the peak body worker that was undertaking the policy advocacy process after seeking input from community members.

I do like to network quite a lot and work with different groups to further my CD work. And wherever possible, I try to look at some policy direction to see if I can influence that, even though that might not be in my project brief. I always try to look a bit more structurally. I had an aged-care advisory group, which consisted of local ethnic groups and we met monthly. We made sure we had regional and rural representation. It (the representation) was widespread (V5).

V5, located organisationally on the vertical plane, is connecting with local groups across the state and seeking representation from members on an advisory group. By trying to be inclusive of a range of community member perspectives, V1 is ensuring that any social policy development or reform process in which the peak body engages will be more appropriate and helpful to people from ethnic groups across the state, including those in regional and rural areas.

In summary, several key points about structuring emerged from discussion in this section. Firstly, the stories and examples demonstrate a commitment to citizen-led, or bottom-up processes for political engagement. Secondly, the aim of the practice is to also effect change systemically, and the examples have included strategies such as: developing networks at local, regional and state-wide levels; building regional infrastructure; social policy and systems advocacy. Thirdly, the practice described illustrates practitioners' ability to keep their eye on specific goals over a long period of time. They show they are analysing the environment as it changes and adapt to those changes by developing new strategies to achieve their goals.

The high theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) common to the practitioners in this section may be linked to their adaptability or action-research mindset, their perseverance

when attempting to affect long-term change and the organisational support they receive to engage in structuring processes with community members across various levels. Also, as connections with community members affected by issues are integral to the majority of the structuring processes, this suggests direct feedback to the practitioner is taking place about the effectiveness of their practice. This kind of feedback loop may not be present in processes where community members are not integral to the work. Moreover, this approach suggests that people involved in what are often lengthy processes, celebrate wins together and, because not every social change endeavour will be successful, support each other through setbacks. This level of collegiality could be satisfying for practitioners, contributing to their general perseverance despite the challenges they face.

Whether community members are integral to the structuring of community development work is the counterpoint between work discussed in this section and the work discussed in section 6.6, below. As was evident in section 6.4 (local level work only), the following category of work also shows two distinct levels of espoused practice theory and practice-in-action congruency, low and high.

6.6 Work at a local level with community members and work beyond the local level driven by practitioners.

This section discusses the work of nine practitioners, Q2, Q6, Q8, Q9, V4, V6, V10, V11 and V12, all of whom are working or attempting to work at two levels. Structuring work for these practitioners means they work at, or have connections at a local level, but they also discussed other types of work being enacted at levels beyond the local. The approaches being used when working beyond the local level include building regional infrastructure, developing regional partnerships and statewide networks, or other social policy or political party policy development and reform processes. Structuring for these practitioners means they advocate *for* groups or *on behalf of* community members, about issues directly affecting those groups or community members. Regarding network development, structuring can mean that issues for large numbers of network members can be shared and decisions taken about developing collective actions about those issues.

The theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) of practitioners in this category is mixed. Four practitioners, Q2 (Story # 8), Q8 (Story # 9), V6 and V12 (both, Story # 9) have low congruency. Five practitioners in this category, Q6 and Q9 (Story # 10), V4, V10 and V11 (all, Story #11) have high congruency. Examples of practice to illustrate various approaches for structuring community development will be discussed in this order, commencing with those with low congruency, followed by those with high congruency.

Two practitioners, Q2 and Q8, gave clear examples of regional partnerships and regional infrastructure that had been created. Creating strategic alliances and building infrastructure regionally is seen as a way to support and sustain more local community development efforts. The distinguishing feature of these approaches is that practitioners advocate *for* the views of community members in processes of regional structuring. Practitioners believe they have the ability to advocate for community members in these cases because they have direct connections with community members through other avenues of their development practice, for instance, if they also work at a local level with groups.

Story # 8 Regional Infrastructure to Support Local Work

Q2, with low theory-action congruency, discussed a formal regional partnership comprised of organisations that undertake community development work in various localities across a region. The aim of creating the regional structure was to have a greater voice on matters common to the work of four local organisations and to support these groups in their local efforts. The four organisations have created a new legal entity for their regional structure, a non-trading co-operative. The co-operative is comprised of eight members, including the senior worker and one management committee member from each of the four incorporated associations. Furthermore, each member organisation of the co-operative has maintained their individual legal status as incorporated associations. They took this decision to remain separate entities and only formally partner at a regional level because they believed this would ensure their locally-focused approach to community work would be maintained. They had previously witnessed other processes where small organisations had merged with a larger organisation and had lost freedom to be locally-responsive because of organisational-wide imperatives post-amalgamation.

When responding to the question about perceived benefits of membership in the co-operative, Q2 asked a series of rhetorical questions:

What are the projects the Co-op needs to do so that it really puts its structural stuff into effect and tests it? That's one thing it needs to do. But it needs to really grow itself into a sustainable thing in itself; and what does that look like? I don't think we're clear about that yet. And there needs to be some thinking about how will these projects both expand the capacity of each organisation to do their local work, *and*, build the capacity of the Co-op to be a regional body, which can then play in the same ball-park as the bigger organisations do (Q2, original emphasis).

Q2's questions suggest the regional partnership might be at a point where it may be worthwhile to reflect on its original aims regarding the establishment of the entity and how the structuring process is enabling the attainment of those aims, including how it is directly benefitting or not benefitting Q2's local work. Q2's comments seem to suggest that the cooperative's reflexive stance needs review. The term "reflexive" is being used here as, "an individual's self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in the process" (D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez 2007).

Q2's account suggests that members of the co-operative demonstrated reflexivity at the setting up phase when they decided *not* to amalgamate. The co-operative was attempting to maintain the member organisations' vision for local work *and* to work co-operatively at a regional level. At a time when development equates with growth, and where mergers and amalgamations are typical responses to neo-liberal forces impacting on small community-based organisations (Burkett 2011), the cooperative's stance to structure their organisation this way is unusual. This suggests the co-operative aims to be qualitatively different from other kinds of regional entities, by making structural links and also remaining responsive to disparate locality needs. At a time when competition is the dominant discourse (Kenny 2011) amongst social service organisations, this example of structuring is placing value on the discourse of cooperation, arguably, a concept at the heart of community development.

Story # 9 Regional Development Work

Whereas this example above locates structuring work *within* the social service sector, Q8's response to the question introduces concepts about making links *beyond* the social service sector. Q8, with low theory-action congruency, works for a community development organisation that has a regional focus, in a location where mining (resource extraction) is one of the main industries and where economic development dominates many regional initiatives. Q8's structuring work involves making "strategic alliances" with corporations, unions and the regional university, all with the aim of "getting community issues on the agenda" (Q8).

So, it is very easy for everything to be 'economically-driven', the basis for how we make decisions. But we'd be the voice that said, 'there's a social side to everything you're doing, every decision that gets made'. We wrote a paper, "The Social Impact of Economic Growth", and then invited people to set up a collaborative group, now called the 'Social Impacts Action Group'. We are making sure social impacts are recognised; and the work of community-based organisations is recognised and valued across the community (Q8).

Through Q2 and Q8's narratives, two approaches to partnerships have been discussed. One, where a regional entity was created, comprised of organisations with very *similar mandates* and another, where a regional entity made linkages with other established entities holding very *different mandates*. The latter has the additional aim of making explicit the needs of vulnerable community members and creating partnerships to address those needs. The distinguishing feature of both of these approaches to structuring is creating linkages and increasing the relative power of the weaker entities by banding together.

Like others in this study, V6 discussed networking and networks in relation to structuring community development work. V6, with low theory-action congruency, attends a number of sub-regional and state-wide networks as a local government community development worker. V6 spoke about concerns that, at the networks, "a lot of issues are raised" concerning V6's constituents' lives, and "it's very hard" for these issues or anything else to be acted upon. This possibly suggests that these networks do not see group action-oriented work or project work as one of their functions and, therefore, they have no mandate to act. Alternatively, as V6 believes, time to commit to these processes and lack of leadership are other factors for their inaction.

The final practitioner of those with low theory-action congruency in this section, V12, was another practitioner that talked about planning and policy infrastructure in relation to structuring work.

Practitioners need to put *their voice* into that area. I think that's where practitioners see their role to be, but, it's *too tempting* to decide, 'oh, I'll help that person today', instead of voice my opinion in this forum. I think CD work should be *about the system* quite a bit; whereas it tends to be people trying to be *helpful* in a short-term way. They can use a lot of their energy and time doing that (V12, original emphasis).

V12 perceives work at other levels, such as in policy and planning infrastructure domains, as a form of political engagement and essential to advance issues. This echoes a number of earlier comments made about the perceived possibility for greater social change when various types of work are undertaken in concert.

The participants discussed in this section, Q2, Q8, V6 and V12, demonstrated low theory-action congruency. A range of factors has contributed to their low congruency. Like Q5 discussed in section 6.4, Q2 also enacts multiple roles, both as a development worker and as a coordinator of the organisation. Additionally, Q2 undertakes this work part-time, because the full-time funded position has been split between two workers, both of whom work in distinct localities across a region. This suggests that Q2's organisation is attempting to be responsive, working in various communities across a geographic area. However, in the organisation's attempt to problem-solve the related human resource management issues, they have seemingly put Q2 under significant pressure to enact multiple roles, decreasing Q2's effectiveness.

The lack of clear mandates for action and the lack of clear links with local work seem to be a contributing factor to V6's low theory-action congruency. Compared with others in this study, V6's and Q8's relatively few years of work experience, (five years and four years respectively), could also be reasons for low congruency, particularly when considering the length of time it takes to achieve results. For V12, geographic isolation as a rural practitioner is also seen as a factor contributing to low congruency.

Several key points about structuring emerged from this discussion. Practitioners view structuring as making links between local level work and other kinds of work beyond the local to effect change systemically. This may include regional partnerships with organisations with great similarities or with organisations that are very different, but have enough in common to work together on specific projects. Networking is also a way of structuring. By having processes through which local work is supported, or where local issues can be redressed in realms beyond the local, practice could be made more effective.

Structuring Beyond the Local and Practitioners with High Theory-Agency Congruency

This section discusses the final group; those who structure beyond the local level and also have high theory-action congruency. The practice approaches in this section include engagement with peak body processes, creating federations of networks and other social policy development processes including those with a political party.

Q6, with high theory-action congruency, discussed a connection being made with a statewide peak body for grandparents. Many of the Indigenous community members with whom Q6 works are grandparents, often in situations where they are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Q6 is working with the peak body to advance policy issues with the aim of easing the financial stress some grandparents face. These processes with the peak body do not involve direct connections between the Indigenous grandparents with whom Q6 works and members of the peak body, although creating those connections had been Q6's original intention. When I asked Q6 about the merits of involving community members in peak-body work, Q6's perception was that some people associated with this particular peak body held views about Indigenous Australians that would not be helpful to establishing those relationships, indicating racist attitudes. This suggests that Q6 is seeking to advance the needs of Indigenous grandparents, but also not cause any emotional harm or disenfranchisement to the community members as a result of the structuring efforts. Q6 hopes for opportunities to involve Indigenous grandparents in this work in the future.

The final group of four practitioners, Q9, V4, V10 and V11, differ from Q6 because they talked about structuring community development as establishing networks and then joining these into a federation of networks (Gilchrist 2009).

Story # 10 Networking to Hear the Perspectives of Large Numbers of People, whilst Leading from Behind

When answering the specific question on structuring, Q9, with high theory-action congruency, told the story of a number of networks Q9 oversees as a local government team-leader. The following quote illustrates why Q9 believes these networks are important, and also flags Q9's approach to leadership.

Our job is to understand the experience of young people in a large local government area. And we can't do that. So, early on, people before me made the decision that we would have a really key role in resourcing youth interagency networks. But it's never been something *we've run*, we've always resourced it, and it's made a real difference (Q9, original emphasis).

The mechanisms inherent in the networks ensure a large number of young people's views are represented in a sizeable local government municipality. The views heard feed into subsequent policy and program-planning the council undertakes.

Q9's emphasis on "it's never been something we've run" is a significant point about the type of leadership Q9 is employing. It suggests that Q9 sees value in creating vehicles that bring youth workers together, and also the importance of not allowing the council to dominant agendas. To clarify the point about not dominating, I asked Q9 if this model of networking produces any challenges in creating or maintaining structures like these. Q9 responded:

It's interesting; it's to do enough. It's that the network has to *energise itself*. So, the challenge is to resource it without taking the lead, so that the network can function as a network (Q9, original emphasis).

Q9's strong emphasis on the individual network's ability to "energise itself" suggests that the aim for those groups, to some degree at least, is to find some internal motivating force. This type of energy strengthens and rejuvenates groups, which is particularly important for sustaining processes in the long-term. It also indicates a level of ownership by the 100

members of each of the networks with which the council is involved. Q9 is alluding to walking a fine line between *coordinating* processes, where the practitioners are at the centre of all activity, and *facilitating or enabling* processes, where the practitioners locate themselves alongside others in the group.

This example differs from the next, in that it facilitates network members to gather together physically across an area of a capital city. The next example is of a federation of networks across a state, where managing the network has meant the introduction of another layer of networking at a regional level.

Story # 11 A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level

V4, V10 and V11, all with high theory-action congruency, belong to the same state-wide network of neighbourhood centres. V4 and V10 practice as ‘networkers’ within the federation of networks, comprising 350 neighbourhood houses and learning centres across the state. V11 is also a member of this network, with two roles, as a practitioner at a locally-based centre and as a volunteer on the management committee of the neighbourhood houses peak body, (which itself is a member of the state-wide network). This sector has created a three-tiered system involving networks of individual houses in a geographic region, which are supported by one of 16 community development practitioners in ‘networker’ positions. The ‘networkers’ also network amongst themselves when connections are made with the state-wide peak body.

V10’s view is that this federation of networks can be an effective vehicle through which issues from across the state can be taken from a local level with significant community member involvement, through to policy-level domains, thereby amplifying and giving weight to matters of local concern. The following quote illustrates community member input into neighbourhood houses’ committees of management.

One of the things that characterises the neighbourhood house committees of management is perhaps *user representation*, strong user representation on the committee of management. So generally, that will mean the majority of people sitting

on the committee will have a genuine interest in the house, a direct interest, as a participant, or as a *volunteer* within that house (V10, original emphasis).

Over a ten-year period, V4 played a pivotal role in the structuring work to gain funding and establish the federation of networks of which V4, V10 and V11 are members. At V4's interview, when asked about processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of community development processes, V4 told this story of establishing the federation of networks.

Well, I'd have to say to that question, the neighbourhood houses campaign; definitely. So, when I first came into the sector in 1999, it was a \$3.2 million budget for the coordination program; it's now nearly \$21 million. So, in fact, I believe that was a strong community development practice that made a massive structural change; at the political level (V4).

V4 and others involved in the vision to establish this federation of networks have taken a long-term approach to build significant network infrastructure. They are using that infrastructure to support and sustain local community development work and other types of work, such as occasional child care services. They are using processes that involve community members to varying degrees and advocate about particular issues to benefit the tens of thousands of people across local communities each year who are members of or use neighbourhood centres.

The last practitioner is this group of three, V11, works for a local neighbourhood learning centre and is also on the management committee of the peak body of neighbourhood houses discussed above. V11 is also on the policy committee for a political party that is currently leading the federal government. I asked V11 about the significance of working both locally, at the learning centre, and the considerable voluntary effort V11 is putting in at these other levels.

I believe you have to address it at both ends. You've got to have the policies...and you have to work on where they're going, to the recipients for those (policies and practices) (V11).

The five practitioners in this latter section of section 6.6 all have high theory-action congruency. Q6 is making clear linkages between local group work and an advocacy process in a discrete area of practice, that is, issues that exist for Indigenous grandparents. Having a narrow focus such as this could be contributing to Q6's high theory-action congruency, as the size and scope of issues seems to be within Q6's capacity to influence change.

With 23 years of experience as a community development practitioner, Q9 is one of those most experienced in this study. In Q9's current middle-management role within a local government municipality, Q9 has been able to influence processes within that council, bringing the resources that come with that council to the networking process. Q9 has also spent years building up the federation of youth worker networks, and making linkages with departments across the council and within state government. The emphasis Q9 has placed on creating a community of practice, with workers in localities and their connections with vast numbers of young people, assists Q9's structuring efforts to be effective.

The Victorian network of neighbourhood houses has critical mass. With their large membership and ability to mobilise activities across levels – local, regional and state, V4, V10 and V11 have a sense of their practice being effective. They have spent over ten years with a singular purpose, to build infrastructure and gain funding to adequately resource their federation of networks, ensuring community development activities across the state are strengthened through this infrastructure.

Longevity of practice experience is the common feature of the practitioners in this section with high theory-action congruency. The least experienced had seven years and the most experienced had 34 years. They work for organisations that support their efforts to work locally themselves, or connect with those who work locally, and they are also supported to work systemically. They are all using or creating infrastructure (peak bodies and networks) to take agendas forward and to influence outcomes for their constituents.

In summary, the discussion in this section has shown that structuring community development is about working at various levels, and includes processes where the perspectives of people directly affected by issues can be heard directly or are being represented.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored how practitioners put their understanding of structure and community development into practice. Various collective approaches and processes have been discussed which practitioners believe are tools for political engagement. This engagement ensures that people's views, those not normally considered by powerful structures, can have greater political impact. The discussion has also shown that there is no single way to engage in this work; but having clear goals and an ability to analyse a changing environment and adapt to that environment seems crucial.

Eight practitioners focus on local-level work only, and 14 are working at multiple levels, either directly with community members or indirectly through worker representation and advocacy processes. More than half the sample, thirteen, is working from a bottom-up perspective with community members who drive their own community development processes. In relation to structuring beyond the local level, fourteen are working with and without community members, at levels to advocate and influence, demonstrating a structural analysis linked to their practice.

Eight practitioners demonstrated low congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice, three Queenslanders and five Victorians. For the Queenslanders, the issues contributing to their low congruency included having multiple roles and lack of experience. For the Victorians, the issues contributing to their low congruency were mainly based on issues directly related to their employing organisation or geographic isolation.

Fourteen practitioners demonstrated high congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice, seven Queenslanders and seven Victorians. Six of those Queenslanders have been trained in a specific methodology for community development practice suggesting they have clarity about how to approach this complex work. The one other Queenslanders untrained in community development methodology has considerable work experience, knows the system well, and has chosen to focus on a narrow range of community-member issues to ensure the practice is effective. Although trained in different approaches to community development, six of the seven Victorians with high congruency have had community

development training, which suggests that may be contributing to their sense of agency and efficacy.

Chapter Five discussed the organisational systems where community development practice takes place. This chapter has shown how practitioners are working horizontally and vertically within that system, and also creating webs of connections within that system. This kind of patterning within the system assists practitioners to make sense of complicated work, that aims to reduce disadvantage and involves a myriad of people across different contexts to achieve that aim.

The next chapter discusses the frameworks for practice in use, which serve as a guide for structural practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Exploring Practitioners' Frameworks of Practice for Structural Community Development

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters discussed the way practitioners analyse structure and community development, and how they put this analysis into practice when employing various methods or approaches. A key point that emerged from the findings in those chapters was that by applying a structural analysis, using a range of lenses, opportunities to influence those structures takes place through collective action. There are many forms of collective action and, oftentimes, the aim of such action is to ensure people's views, especially those marginalised within society, are considered to a greater degree by powerful structures. Further, having theory-action congruency is vital. Practitioners with high congruency can feel assured they are being effective in achieving their practice goals.

This chapter, the third and final chapter reporting the results of this study, turns to the various frameworks of practice being utilised by participants. It addresses two research questions: "What frameworks for practice emerged from the data? What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?"

The remainder of this chapter is set out in five sections. The next section defines more fully what is meant by the concept 'a framework of practice'. The third, fourth and fifth sections present three distinct organising frameworks that emerged from the data, *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. This is followed by the sixth section, which discusses two implications for practice resulting from these organising frameworks. An argument is made that for greater effectiveness in structural practice, communities of practice be established and practitioners develop strategies to sustain themselves for the long-term nature of this work.

7.2 Defining and Using Frameworks of Practice

Frameworks of practice help a practitioner ‘frame the work’, that is, make sense of complex situations, enabling their capacity to respond constructively in their work (Lathouras 2010). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:321) argue “every community worker will conceptualise practice in a different way”. Moreover, practitioners will build an individual practice framework helping them make sense of what the work is about, and this understanding changes with experience (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:321).

Ife and Tesoriero do not discuss the extent to which practitioners actually engage in developing an explicit personal framework of practice. Rather, they outline a theoretical framework for community work, with questions for reflection to assist a practitioner to start to develop their own. This approach of writing about practice theory, proposing *a framework* for a particular type of practice and listing questions for reflection to help practitioners develop their own, is also seen in other related literature. One example is Healy (2005), who has a chapter on creating frameworks for practice in relation to social work.

Five of the twenty-two participants explicitly referred to their own personal framework of practice (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7 and Q10). These were all Queenslanders who have studied community development at the same tertiary institution where the course entitled “Frameworking for Community Development” has been taught over many years (Westoby & Ingamells 2011)⁸. Two other participants explicitly referred to particular theoretical frameworks informing their practice, such as “a (human) rights framework” (V4), a “capacity-building framework” (V4), or a “health promotion framework” (V3). The term was also used to distinguish a “community work framework” (V4) from, for example, “a social policy framework” (V4).

The remaining participants, although not explicit about *a* personal framework that guides their practice, clearly draw on a range of factors when conceptually organising their work. The approach being taken to present this data is employing part of the process Westoby and Ingamells (2011) describe, when student-practitioners construct their framework of practice,

⁸ Westoby, P & Ingamells, A. 2011. This article discusses how “frameworking” has been taught in one postgraduate course in Queensland. However, the concept has also been a feature of other community development courses taught at the same tertiary institution.

namely by, “collecting data” and “transforming data to dimensions”. They cite Anthony Kelly, the first convenor of the postgraduate course discussed above, who argued:

Frameworks enable us (practitioners) to name important dimensions of our work and make us conscious of the way we work – providing predictable routine, safe tasks for beginning and processing the recurring dilemmas... A framework organises our thinking so that we can begin to order our action, it doesn’t order reality or make it come true (Kelly, n.d. unpublished).

The remainder of this chapter discusses the key dimensions of three practice frameworks drawn from practitioners’ data, collected through both Stage One and Stage Two processes. The three frameworks comprise various types of dimensions and these relate to: a goal or goals, a set of processes, a base of knowledge, or a combination of these dimension types. The three frameworks encompass the approaches of all the participants, however, all the participants did not relate to each of the three frameworks. I am proposing that individual practitioners draw from these frameworks to varying degrees. Similarly, the way the various frameworks together inform practice also varies from practitioner to practitioner. I also acknowledge that, as an organising mechanism, the frameworks presented here are relatively broad ways of thinking about structural community development. Individual practitioners’ personal frameworks of practice would include more nuanced dimensions, however the aim here is to name the *key* dimensions.

Three clear findings and frameworks emerged when analysing the data:

1. The first framework presented, *Structural Connecting*, is the one that all participants had in common. Similarities were found across the cohort despite the backgrounds of individual practitioners and the broad range of practice contexts. These relate to practice undertaken at the local level and relate to practice as a vehicle for social change. Specifically, the change being sought in this framework includes the ‘goals’ of *Equality* and *Empowerment*. To achieve these goals, a ‘process’ dimension relates to *Forming Developmental Relationships* and draws on a ‘knowledge’ dimension named as having a *Community Analysis*, which leads to *Collective Action*.
2. The second framework presented, *Structural Shaping*, is the one that only

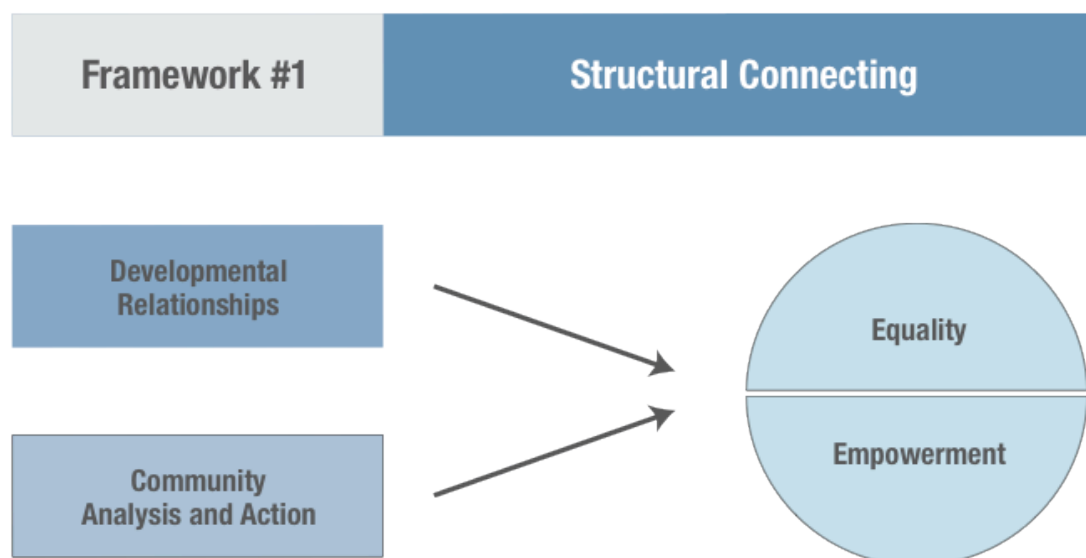
practitioners with high theory-action congruency utilised. These practitioners are seeking the ‘goal’ of *Incremental Social Change*. Theory-action congruency was created when practitioners had an understanding that structures can be acted upon or that practice shapes context. They drew from two ‘knowledge’ dimensions named as *A Nuanced Understanding of Power* and *Systems-Thinking*.

3. The third framework presented, *Structural Politicking*, signaled the greatest divergence within the group. This occurred when practice was viewed as a form of political action. Practitioners drawing from this framework are seeking the ‘goal’ of *Democratic Equality*. When drawing from the ‘knowledge’ dimension named as *Hegemony*, work takes place beyond the local level. Practitioners aim to redress disadvantage by two distinct means. These include processes involving the people who experience disadvantage themselves, through *Citizen Participation* or other processes, where practitioners engage in *Advocacy*.

7.3 Structural Connecting

When local level practice was discussed, the framework *Structural Connecting*, emerged from the data. See diagram, (Figure 8), below.

Figure 8: Framework No. 1 – Structural Connecting



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: the formation of developmental relationships and the subsequent community analysis established with members of groups creates the circumstances for commitment to collective action. The action undertaken is working towards the creation of a more egalitarian society, and/or the empowerment of people involved in processes.

7.3.1 At the Heart of Practice – Equality and Empowerment

Community development practitioners are agents of social change. Social change was discussed in two ways, in terms of creating a more egalitarian society and as processes that are empowering for participants of groups.

The distinction between these two emphases can be explained by the degree to which practitioners viewed social change processes as addressing the root causes of oppression, that is, the reason people become disadvantaged in the first instance. The latter suggests that social change goals might have longer-term commitments to action, and involve structuring beyond the local level. For example,

(It's about) *balancing an inequality* that exists, where only certain voices tend to get heard within society (V10, original emphasis).

Addressing structural disadvantage is very important. Doing that structural analysis in our work on a continuing basis to inform our work. Knowing where *we are* in that process. And I suppose how that relates to the organisations we're working in and therefore, influences our work in terms of the participants that we're meeting each day and working with, creating some sort of a change movement in their life (QM7, original emphasis).

In the second quote, QM7's emphasis on "knowing where we are" in a process suggests an acknowledgment of the complexity of the work and context when practitioners are seeking to redress inequality. It also suggests that, at any given time, locating oneself within ongoing processes is important because otherwise one could become overwhelmed by the complexity.

Social change processes couched in terms of empowerment were also commonplace in the data. This concept was discussed as applicable to individuals and to groups as they work together for a range of social change goals. The following quotes are examples of typical comments and their implicit understanding of how community development processes can be empowering.

You see the light in their eyes, you feel the fire in their belly, you see them trying things, stuffing up and dusting themselves off and having another go, and just this eruption of spirit (Q10).

When something gels, and the group starts, there's just so much possibility and potential there...suddenly what people can do, or what they're accessing or what they know. The landscape has changed in a positive way (Q1).

Both these quotes suggest community development processes can be empowering for those involved. The latter is specifically referring to a point in a group process when group members, because of their participation, become more empowered as they now have access to a range of alternatives they did not have prior to their involvement.

This discussion suggests that social change can be seen as an aim, to achieve equality, and as a series of empowering processes towards a number of different ends. However, the goals of equality and empowerment are not dimensions unique to community development; other forms of practice might also have these aims. The distinguishing feature of this form of practice, compared with other types, is the idea of *collectivity*, in which processes of collective action are empowering. Forming particular kinds of bonds, especially those providing a sense of solidarity, and establishing a collective analysis are the formative steps for collective action. These themes are discussed in the next three sub-sections.

7.3.2 Structuring for Collective Action

Oftentimes, community development is instigated when individuals present to agencies with private concerns about aspects of their lives. Workers can respond in a number of ways, and Q5's quote below, provides an example.

One of my observations over all these years is people don't know what they don't know. So when they come in, they often don't know that it's even an option to mobilise with other people around addressing a shared need. So, that's what I'm listening for, the public dimension of the private story, that is really the important part of the work, hearing that story, then seeing the potential for that story to become public action rather than a private response only (Q5).

Mobilising people into collective action is one of the normative ideas associated with community development practice. Much of the literature refers to practice as collective action or "mobilising" which, put simply, means "getting people involved in social actions" (Rubin & Rubin 2005:193). Adages such as "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts", or "many hands make light work" resonate when thinking about the benefits of people banding together to tackle common concerns. When asked about their community development work, all participants discussed these ideas of the collective nature of practice. However, this could be seen as one of the limitations of this study, the assumption that practice always involves processes that are collective in nature. The question was not asked of the participants about the degree to which collective practice occurs compared with practice remaining in private realms, those not resulting in collective action.

Collective practice considers the structural dimension of group formation processes and the ongoing dynamics within a group once formed. Yet, groups are made up of individuals and structural practice also involves forming developmental relationships with individuals, formative processes having the potential for collective action, discussed next.

7.3.3 The Structural Nature of Developmental Relationships

Forming relationships with people was another of the normative ideas of community development discussed across the data. It was raised as one of the core ideas in relation to the role or purpose of practice, yet the concept was given relatively cursory attention at interview. To a great extent, this idea was implicit, something that just happens in the normal course of events of practice. Where the concept was discussed more deeply was in relation to the practice of addressing disadvantage. For example,

I really believe that poverty is a product of the break down of relationships between people. What I believe community development does is connect people back together again. It doesn't eliminate the disadvantage but it creates a *context* in which people now have a sense of responsibility *for one another* (Q10, original emphasis).

In our neighbourhoods we've fragmented our contacts with each other. I think we need to rebuild those. We start with those small locus' of connections, relationship building, trust and opportunities of inclusion and participation. To be able to express how disadvantage is affecting them or impacting on their lives...then there can be collaboration in networks, which include those people as participants for social change (Q7).

In these examples, Q10 and Q7 see relationship building as an avenue by which people form relationships and groups, and these groups in turn, address issues that affect group members' lives. Given the implicit nature of the concept amongst participants, further examination from the literature is warranted.

Owen and Westoby (2011) theorise the structure of dialogic practice, that is, particular communication skills helpful when "bringing people together" in community development processes. They contend community development theory has overlooked the value of the critical first steps involved in forming "purposeful developmental relationships" that lay the platform for community processes (Owen & Westoby 2011). Developmental relationships, they argue, are those that involve "sustaining connection" with people through an approach to dialogue and have the dual aims of developing *mutual relationships* and also *strategic outcomes* (Owen & Westoby 2011, my emphasis). The former has no instrumental goal beyond developing a mutual connection with another person, and the latter has an instrumental focus based on practitioners achieving "developmental outcomes", those embracing a degree of "pragmatic strategy" (Owen & Westoby 2011).

The term "mutuality" is focused on the humanizing dimension of communication and relationship-making (Owen & Westoby 2011). Qualitatively, the term can be seen as one of the fundamental building blocks for collective practice. People may see the value in collective action if they have a sense that others share their common interests or concerns.

This type of relationship-making, communicate the ideas of ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’, a sociological theory about social groups developed by Ferdinand Tonnies (1887/2002). In the wake of the breakdown of traditional communities and the development of the modern industrial society (Ife & Tesoriero 2006), Tonnies’ Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society) refer to ways human beings interact and organise (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:18) define these as,

In a Gemeinschaft society, people interact with a relatively small number of other people, whom they know well, in many different roles, whereas in Gesellschaft society, one has interactions with many more people, but these interactions are limited to instrumental activities.

In a Gesellschaft society, we do not know most of the people with whom we have contact, as relationships are relegated to the public roles people enact in society and communication is limited to a discrete transaction associated with that role (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). If the emphasis is placed on ‘community’, where people *commune* with one another, this encourages people to interact with others as “whole people” (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:97). This creates a richer, deeper form of social interaction and enables a wider range of individual talents and abilities to emerge which will benefit others and the community as a whole (Ife & Tesoriero 2006).

The idea that people from very different spheres in society can develop mutual relationships and these may lead to collective action is salient. In an earlier work, Westoby and Owen (2009) argue the first stage of community development practice requires practitioners to be conscious of the sociality of the inter-subjective. “Sociality” is defined as a mode of conscious action within a determinable sphere of social relations (Westoby & Owen 2009). The sociality of practice is the regular, disciplined practice of particular kinds of communication and action for the purposes of developmental work (Westoby & Owen, 2009). Sociality, in Westoby and Owen’s (2009) framework, draws on Martin Buber’s (1937) philosophy of dialogue. Buber’s thesis differentiated between ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ relationships. Of these, the I-Thou depicts the relationship between people as one of mutuality, openness, and directness (Lathouras 2010). White (2008) discusses Buber’s conception of dialogue as located within theories where there is a valorization of

communication as *communion*; where, through dialogue, a bond is formed. These conceptions of dialogue emphasise an accommodation of otherness, a commitment to ethical processes and the potential to produce profound personal and social transformations (White, 2008).

These ideas of Buber's were discussed by practitioners in relation to the micro processes of personal interaction within community development groups. For example, V1's comments below suggest a number of qualities of 'communion', those that enable transformative processes.

Or you can say *community* development...that to me, is that we get a sense of what the heck do we mean with that gift exchange, with that reciprocity, with that sharing space and time, with that form of sacrificing self-interest for common interest, which we call 'communion' (V1, original emphasis).

In addition to forming mutual connections, Owen and Westoby's (2011) emphasis on "pragmatic strategy" is the other side of the coin when forming developmental relationships. Their article uses an example of a narrative in which a practitioner's mandate for work stymies the developmental potential for collective action, when the worker privileges organisational imperatives over maintaining a mutual relationship with a community member through dialogue. A "mandate", they argue, "is an explicit contract through which an individual performs an agreed range of tasks *with*, or on behalf of, another individual or individuals" (Owen & Westoby 2011, my emphasis). Establishing and maintaining a dialogical and developmental ethos rather than a directive one, leads to motivation and hopefulness (Owen & Westoby 2011). The mandate for community development should be to seek outcomes and processes which instill a sense of hopefulness that private concerns can be addressed, and also foster motivation towards action to address those concerns. This suggests that formative steps for community development need to include these qualities associated with forming developmental relationships.

Owen and Westoby (2011) conclude their article by stating formative practices are "fraught with positional biases, tensions around mandates and institutional or systematic barriers and determine, from the outset, the extent to which a community development process will be mutually beneficial or not". This point was mirrored in the data. When asked about barriers

to transformation, typical comments were similar to these two examples.

Although government are saying that they support and believe in community development, it's a very top-down, service provision model of community development that I see happening (V4).

'Professionalisation'. Or, another way of saying that is 'a worker's agenda'. A 'worker's agenda', that comes from a 'funding source agenda' (Q9).

The concern for practice, particularly practice undertaken by those in paid capacities, is holding in tension developmental outcomes within the dominant service-delivery culture that exists in the Australian welfare state. Top-down or practitioner-led models of practice have the potential to reduce community members' ability for social change. Boyte (2008) theorises the decline of civic life when he emphasises the widespread "service economy", one which fosters "technocracy", defined as control by outside experts. Technocracy, Boyte (2008) argues, has eroded people's civic development, where the dominant service economy trains professionals to look at people's deficiencies and generates a culture of rescue (Boyte, 2008). Although there was no evidence that the experienced practitioners interviewed for this study ascribed to a rescue culture, constraints associated with their paid roles were widely discussed as problematic.

Writing from the Australian perspective, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) discuss a range of factors impacting on the Australian policy and practice context for community development. They discuss the impact of neo-liberalist and new managerialist ideologies that have a focus on predetermined outputs and outcomes, heightened accountability regimes and a risk-avoidance culture (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:19-22). These contribute to the lack of spaces for creativity about alternative approaches or thinking, and a lack of conditions and time to develop genuine and full relationships with community members (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

This section has described the structure of dialogic practice and issues within practice contexts that could make structural practice challenging. The next section discusses the second key structural dimension within this framework, community analysis.

7.3.4 Community Analysis

A definition of a community analysis is the phase of a process when group members, with a shared understanding of issues, make decisions about mutually beneficial actions and commit to those actions (Lathouras 2010). V12 gives an example,

Whatever the *joining* factor is, their age, their gender, their ethnicity, something about them that they feel they've got in common.... It is about them as a group, in *collective decision-making processes*, tracking their own course...community development is a way of doing that in a more *conscious* way (V12, original emphasis).

Developing a community analysis was another normative idea about community development. However, this was the phase of the work seemingly most troublesome in terms of a range of tensions and challenges. They include creating spaces in which to foster a sense of solidarity despite group configurations; and also levels of vulnerability of group members.

The conditions enabling a community analysis start with basic principles, some of which have been discussed in the sections above. The following quote provides a good summary of practice principles that contribute to the formation of a community analysis. Q10 made these comments in answer to the question, "When you think about practice principles you utilise to achieve outcomes, what comes to mind?" (Researcher)

Develop relationships that are characterised by mutuality. Create a safe space for conversations around issues that people are struggling with. Affirm people's capacity and extend their capacity. Come together to look at ways we can contribute to understand our problems and together look at ways to solve our problems. Make decisions about things that we can do together to work for personal growth and social change. Don't organise anything without energy and passion being present, so that you don't have to use rewards or sanctions for people to act because they're motivated. Then develop structures *around* people and that spirit, passion and sense of responsibility" (Q10, original emphasis).

A crucial aspect of the work is creating safe spaces so people feel they can explore issues in

non-threatening environments, before deciding what steps are necessary to get involved in community processes. This can be somewhat challenging when working with heterogeneous groups, where diversity and difference characterise groups' configurations. However, finding areas of unification leading to collective action with *any* group is necessary. This is the case with homogeneous groups also, for example, where any obvious commonalities exist because members share a common identity or come from a similar cultural background.

A further tension exists when working with groups to form a community analysis, involving challenges around the level of people's vulnerability. The following quote speaks to this issue,

I'm used to methodology where you think you *always* have to get the people affected by the issue together at all times. Which is really *not* necessarily true, and not even necessarily desirable when people are at survival levels, *real* survival levels. So if you're talking about people who have addiction and complex mental health issues and other needs, getting *that* group of people together and getting them to address their needs, it's really unrealistic. I mean, the business of meetings and advancing action and all of that, I think sometimes is asking too much of people who've already got a lot to carry (Q5, original emphasis).

If a practitioner's analysis is that collective action is sometimes asking too much of people because of their level of vulnerability, then this goes some way to explaining why community development may be abandoned in favour of other practice approaches, such as those not involving community members in a collective process of analysis and action.

However, if a framework of practice places community-led processes as central, then practitioners will ensure actions remain driven by community members ensuring achievement of a community analysis. For example, despite advances in the policy and legislative contexts, the following quote indicates an analysis that Indigenous Australians are still experiencing colonization. This means Q4 places community-led analysis and action as central to Q4's framework of practice.

They are still colonized. It sounds harsh; and people don't want to hear that. But that's the case. So you've got all that going on, there's a long history of it, and

people, in their minds and their daily lives, it still impacts from the outside world, from a whole long history. I don't believe in the *Western* development path. I don't have a set definition of what 'improvement' or 'development' is....so the way I try to work with people is *evolving* where *they* want to head to (Q4, original emphasis).

A belief in an ongoing colonizing experience for Indigenous Australians is a strong motivator for Q4's approach to practice. This approach demonstrates anti-oppressive practice, defined as an approach which highlights the "structural contexts" of communities' problems, and urges practitioners to facilitate community members' "critical consciousness of, and collective responses to, the causes of problems" they face (Healy, 2005:173). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:105) argue structures of domination and oppression have resulted in the legitimising of the 'wisdom' of dominant groups in society, while alternative wisdoms of oppressed groups go unrecognised. Community development with Indigenous people must, they argue, move away from something done *to* Indigenous people, to a practice where lessons are learned from oppressed groups (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006:106, their emphasis). Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) 'consciousness-raising' work, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:105) reiterate the merits of community development "from 'below' rather than from 'above'", that is, where people are assisted to articulate their own needs and own strategies to meet those needs.

This discussion has highlighted that community development done *to* any disadvantaged groups in society is problematic. Again, the current policy context in Australia provides an explanation for the predominance of this form of practice. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:86) state the current emphasis in social policy on "community capacity building" stems from ideas of social capital theory, combined with a place-based focus, and particularly targets geographic communities considered as disadvantaged. This approach, with government as initiator and regulator of programs, ideally seeks to recognise and include the role of communities in policy and programs designed to address local issues (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). However, in reality, community members are excluded from making decisions about resources or from controlling processes (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). In essence, community capacity building uses the language of social relationships but ignores the operation of power within those relationships (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:91, citing Ingamells 2007).

In summary, this section has highlighted some of the complexity practitioners face when seeking social change. It discussed the structural dimensions of collective practice, where collective action results from a community analysis. However, practitioners hold in tension a number of often juxtaposing conditions in this phase of the work. These include ideas around the creation of actual spaces for solidarity in which community analyses are formed; the characteristics of people that make up those groups; and the levels of vulnerability of people in those groups. These can also be located within a social policy context.

The wider context also presents opportunities for achieving social change goals. The next section discusses Framework No. 2, *Structural Shaping*. It includes the idea that practitioners have, to varying degrees, a sense of agency to shape the context of practice whilst also holding onto core values informing their framework of practice.

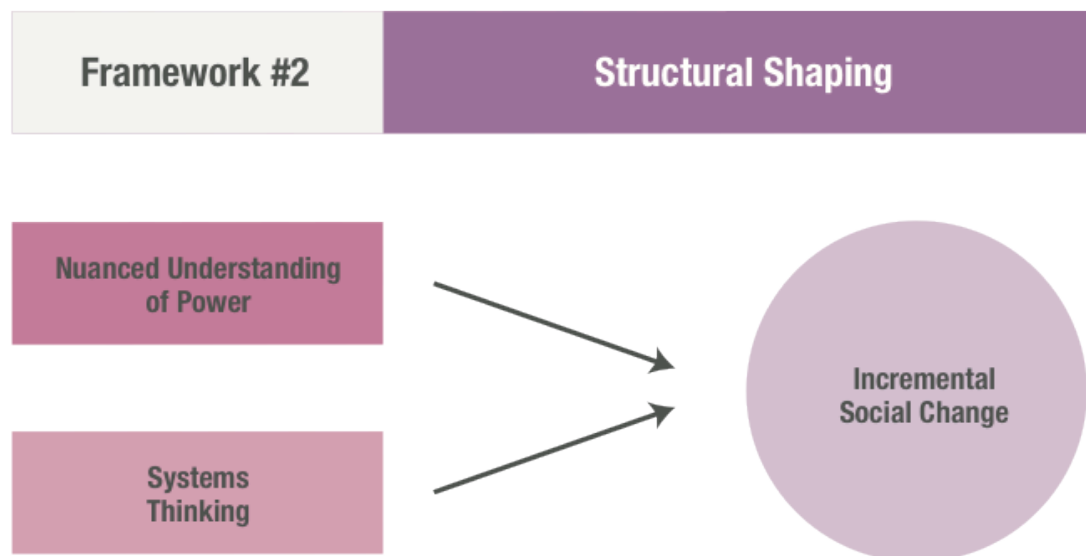
7.4 Structural Shaping

In Chapter Six (Section 6.3) it was proposed that theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) is an important concept because greater synergy between a practitioner's espoused theories and their theories-in-use leads to more effective practice. Argyris and Schön's emphasis on adaptability in relation to changing conditions is fitting when thinking about the complex and ever-changing contexts for community development.

Four practitioners, Q7, Q10, V1 and V10, all who articulated greatest theory-action congruency in relation to this framework, were those who had an understanding that *structures can be acted upon*. Therefore, the key dimension of a framework of practice includes a practitioner's own sense of agency to effect change, despite the complexity of the system, despite organisational constraints, and despite continual exposure to stories of injustice told by community members with whom practitioners work.

Several common dimensions emerged from the data of those practitioners with high theory-action congruency. They include the 'goal' dimension of "Incremental Social Change"; and two 'knowledge base' dimensions including, "A Nuanced Understanding of Power" and "Systems-thinking". With these knowledge bases, practitioners have agency. See diagram, (Figure 9), below.

Figure 9: Framework No. 2 – Structural Shaping



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: with a nuanced understanding of power, and informed by systems-thinking, a greater sense of agency is developed. Action is focusing on a particular type of change being sought, one that is incremental.

7.4.1 A Nuanced Understanding of Power

Power was discussed in Chapter Five in terms of practitioners acknowledging that power is inherent in all kinds of contexts and social relationships. For the majority of the participants in this study, community development's *raison d'être* is analysing power and working in ways to ameliorate its negative consequences. This is achieved through empowering processes, including mobilising, strategising and influencing.

I go to a bit of a power model fairly quickly, of who makes the decisions, what sort of powers they have, how you can influence that process for a fair deal for all (Q7).

A critical stance was also discussed, one based on the idea that with power comes responsibility and the realisation that *any* network or structure has the potential to oppress,

including community development groups.

Gaventa (2006) argues that, while power analysis is important, there is no *one way* of understanding power; its meanings are diverse and often contentious. A more nuanced understanding of power might be to consider different ways of analysing power and its inter-relationships.

I practice great hope, because I believe that every structure is a construct. So everything that is constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Q10).

Q10 is articulating how a re-imagining of power could be seen in a more advantageous light, referring to power to bring about desired change. Gaventa's (2006) frameworks for analysing power show power can be constituted in many ways. These more complex ways of thinking about power were used by practitioners who demonstrated the highest theory-action congruency.

For example, in the following quote, V1 is referring to "big power". Implicit in this term is the idea of 'power-over' (Gaventa 2006). Yet, when V1 refers to the "dialectical structure", there is a suggestion that V1 is also imagining power to include other forms, and spaces for forming relationships based on dialogue, referred to here as "small" power.

You get the 'big' power, but I want to complement that with the small. Power is something, which seeps into *all* the indices of our ways of living, of our ways of relating, our ways of thinking, of our ways of feeling...and so that's also powerful...using that dialectical structure is important (V1, original emphasis).

A dialectical space that re-imagines power may be a space focused more on mutual input, an exchange of ideas and a space where all points of view are considered as valid and heard. These spaces are what Gaventa (2006) refers to as "claimed spaces", spaces for participation which relatively powerless or excluded groups create for themselves.

Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either of one's espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24). A nuanced understanding of power is a frame of reference for how practitioners can

demonstrate adaptability when conditions change. When one understands that dynamic sets of relationships exist and various forms of power are played out across those dimensions, new possibilities emerge for social change.

While analysing power along any of its dimensions of space, level and form may be useful, it is equally important to recognize that these dimensions also interact with each other, Gaventa (2006) argues. Transformative, fundamental change happens “in those rare moments” when social actors are able to work effectively across dimensions simultaneously, both in analysis terms and in strategy terms (Gaventa 2006:26). “The process of change is constantly dynamic - requiring strategies which allow for constant reflection on how power relations are changing and the agility to move across shifting spaces, levels and forms of power” (Gaventa 2006:27). Viewing practice in terms of forms of power and their interaction is one key dimension. Having agility to move across shifting spaces requires the structural dimension of systems-thinking. This was another key dimension demonstrating practitioners’ effectiveness in terms of practice shaping context.

7.4.2 Systems-Thinking

A number of stories in Chapter Six referred to collaborative and partnering work. Wheatley (2006) suggests if one sees a problem with one part of the system, one must also see the dynamics existing between that part and the whole system (Wheatley 2006). Wheatley also argues “the system is capable of solving its own problems” (2006:145). If a system is in trouble, the solutions, she states, are found from within the system and the mechanism for creating health is to connect the system to *more of itself* (Wheatley 2006:145, my emphasis). The kinds of connecting to which Wheatley refers are “critical connections” (2006:45) where, through webs of relations, participants *co-create* new realities.

This type of thinking resonates with the kinds of analyses held by the practitioners with high theory-action congruency. The following quote demonstrates how Q7 enables critical connections when Q7 takes what might be called an educative stance with people involved in processes.

We are working to always educate each other about social inclusion, and how we

inadvertently put up barriers to people's participation. Helping people see processes and why they've worked and how to invite others in. Make that very explicit, almost over do it in a way (Q7).

Q7's Story # 6, *Community Members involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work*, was told in Chapter Six. It was the very successful story of work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians working to reduce racism and break down barriers across a range of historical divides. Q7's comment about making a social inclusion agenda "very explicit" is salient. It suggests the group's analysis about participation is very important. The reference to "how we inadvertently put up barriers to people's participation" suggests that, even with the best of intentions, processes *can be* excluding or damaging to the overall goals being sought. In this case, participation is key to the group's strategy because they are seeking to educate a broad range of participants, including those who develop social policy in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, to the deleterious effects of policies on community members. Moreover, this group develops webs of relationships and, in their planning and strategising they also develop critical understandings about why things have worked. Although not discussed here, the comment suggests the group would also develop a community analysis about why processes may not work. These processes of critical analysis across a web of relations suggest how Q7 is effective in practice.

Q7 appears to be thinking about the system within which they operate as one which is connected, horizontally and vertically. Q7 claims to have created, or is opening up, spaces for dialogue across the system and, with a critical focus, is ensuring those with the least power are given a voice at the table. More significantly, however, what seems evident is the quality of the relationships across the system is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, where all participants are valued for the range of gifts, talents, skills and knowledge they bring to the table.

Wheatley's reference to "critical connections" is useful here; she is not arguing for "critical mass", but "critical connections" (2006:45). Drawing on quantum physics theory, where relationship is the key determiner for explaining all aspects of life, Wheatley argues that it is unknown how small activities within a system may affect the whole system (2006:45). "The challenge for us is to see past the innumerable fragments to the whole, stepping back far enough to appreciate how things move and change as a coherent entity" (Wheatley 2006:43).

Wheatley's emphasis on critical connections is a way the system can be affected as a whole. New realities are co-created and these are the processual aspects (Burkett 2001) of the work given priority by practitioners with high theory-action congruency.

Furthermore, of those practitioners who have the view that practice shapes context, they are holding disparate ideas together. Practitioners referred to various concepts or processes as holding them 'in tension', such as in V1's example below.

(It's) about evolving new structures; and these are practices in our relationships particularly, and even in our ways of thinking which create new structures. What I find important is that we try out new ones; we experiment and hold that tension (V1).

By holding disparate ideas in tension, practitioners are attempting not to privilege some concepts or processes over others. Kaplan (2002:24) refers to this as "seeing holistically". Rather than privileging technical-scientific knowledge (analytic knowledge), a holistic mode of consciousness is complementary to an analytic one; it is systemic thinking, or, the simultaneous perception of the whole (Kaplan 2002). The uncertainties associated with social change work were a feature of many of the interviews. However, for those with high theory-action congruency, these kinds of uncertainties seemed less problematic.

To summarise, their approach to community development work included a nuanced view of power, and processes of establishing webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across a system. Analyses and processes like these fuel their sense of agency to shape the context of their work. The final structural dimension of practice discussed in this section relates to the goal practitioners are seeking, which is *incremental* social change.

7.4.3 Incremental Social Change

In Chapter Five, in the discussion on 'influencing powerful structures', it was shown that the majority of practitioners believed influencing powerful structures was not possible, or was unlikely. These discussions related to structures in society and associated policies which practitioners viewed as oppressive, impacting negatively on the community members with whom they work. It was suggested in that discussion that community development in these

kinds of transformative processes might not be effective.

However, in light of the analysis of systems thinking and a nuanced understanding of power, the data was examined again from the perspective of social change goals. The practitioners with high theory-action congruency held a view that the kind of social change or transformation being sought was *incremental* in nature. They are not seeking total transformation of powerful structures all at one time. Rather, they are seeking incremental social change, another key dimension of this framework for practice.

These changes are *creeping* changes; they keep their heads low (V1, original emphasis).

I understand that there is change that's doable and there is change that is less doable but....we've got runs on the board, we have affected change in certain things, in certain places, at certain times (V10).

So it's about creating social change and making it happen, and it may be two steps forward and one step back (Q7).

Another common factor for practitioners with high-theory action congruency was their length of experience. The median length was 16.5 years. One could argue the greater the length of experience a practitioner, the greater chance of them experiencing both successes and challenges associated with the work. Having had successes and achieving aims would, no doubt, provide a sense that the work is possible and the comments, such as those in the quotes above, allude to this sense of possibility.

However, having greater surety that the work is, or can be, more effective goes deeper than just having an understanding that incremental change is the outcome being sought. Rawsthorne and Howard's (2011) concerns about Australian community work practice were discussed in Chapter Three, where they argued that very little is known about what actually works. The question of effectiveness is a question thoughtful practitioners grapple with daily when using action-research like cycles of planning-acting-reflecting (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:98). However, Rawsthorne and Howard are concerned with the range of collective wisdom available to practitioners when working with communities, particularly the unique

nature of practices which vary according to the particular set of circumstances and people involved in each context (2011:102).

So far, this chapter has discussed two frameworks of structural practice. It commenced with those that include key dimensions common to all participants when practicing at the local level. A second framework of practice discussed key dimensions common to those practitioners who demonstrated high theory-action congruency.

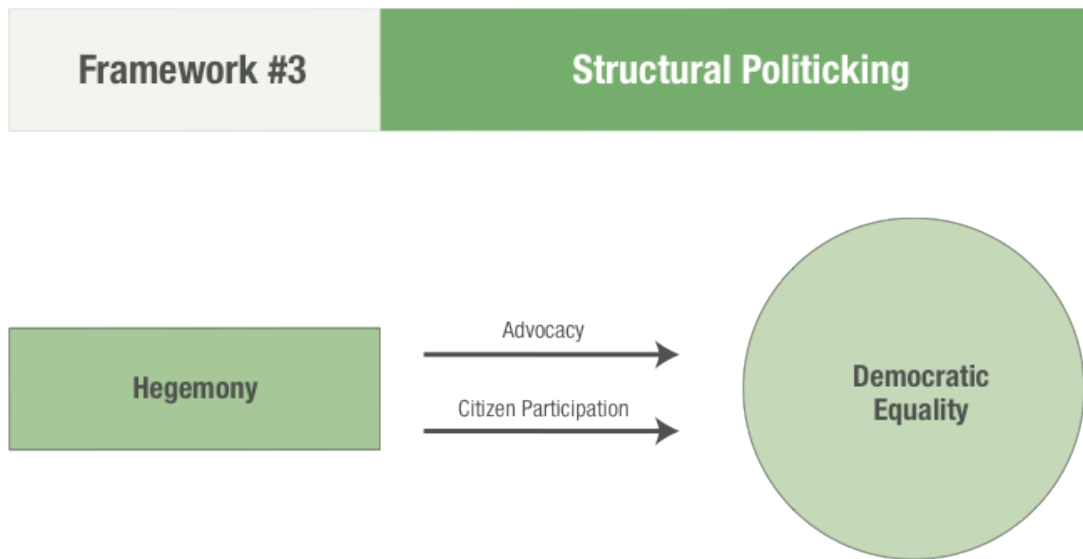
The next section discusses Framework No. 3, *Structural Politicking*. This final set of key dimensions for a framework of practice revealed the greatest difference between all the participants. They convey how structural practice is construed as a form of political action in relationship to the state.

7.5 Structural Politicking

Community development practice can be viewed as a form of political action. However, practitioners' analysis about practice being a tool for political engagement differed considerably. It spanned across the domains of no political engagement, to political engagement in two ways, as practitioner political engagement, and as citizen political engagement. This section outlines the key dimensions for a framework of practice in relation to the latter two, because of their relevance to a theory of structural community development. The word "structural" here is used to describe a form of practice engaging with the structures in society, particularly those within the apparatus of the state. 'The state' is defined as a set of organised governing institutions, formally connected to one another and advancing the common interests of its society (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:2-5).

Several common dimensions emerged from the data when considering practice as a form of political engagement. They include the 'goal' dimension of "Democratic Equality"; the 'knowledge base' dimension, "Hegemony", and two 'process' dimensions, "Influencing through Advocacy" and "Citizen Participation". See diagram, (Figure 10), below.

Figure 10: Framework No. 3 – Structural Politicking



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: with an understanding of power as ‘hegemony’, political engagement occurs in two ways, either as ‘advocacy’ or as ‘citizen participation’. The outcomes practitioners are seeking from their work relate to greater democratic equality.

Democratic equality, as a concept, was raised through the lens of citizenship. The question asked at interview about citizenship was:

CD is a context where people from minority groups can have a space, and find a voice, perhaps leading to greater citizenship within our democratic system. Q: What reflections do you have about this? Examples? (Researcher)

All twenty-two practitioners answered this question readily, suggesting they relate to the concept of citizenship in their practice. For example, one response to the question goes so far as to say it is essentially the nature of the work.

I *do* really think that community work is essentially about ‘citizenship development’, but with a focus on the more marginal citizens, citizens who aren’t participating in the democratic processes; I do think that, essentially that’s the nature of the work (Q5, original emphasis).

However, the question about citizenship was asked towards the end of the interview. In only three cases was the concept raised explicitly prior to answering the direct question on the topic. This suggests that, although participants related to the concept ‘citizenship’, it may not be as central an idea to community development as others, such as poverty or disadvantage, which were discussed much more frequently. However, the idea of community development as political action within a democratic state was inherent in the data. This aspect of practice is discussed in the following section.

7.5.1. Hegemony

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of ‘hegemony’ in the 1920s to explain why workers in capitalist societies so often are not rebellious (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). Hegemony is “the way that a dominant group asserts control over other social groups” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:159), and Gramsci emphasised the subtle way in which dominant attitudes become common sense or internalised, asserting “control over knowledge and culture, affirming the dominant culture and marginalising and silencing others” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:160).

Community development groups are used to re-think dominant attitudes and silencing techniques, to give voice to the people involved. “Hegemony may be oppressive....but hegemony can also be recognised and contested by radical opposition to prevailing oppressive practices” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:303).

Practitioners who think structurally have a power analysis about hegemonic discourses and processes, and their impacts on particular groups of people.

Again, it’s that hegemony stuff that we’re confronted with the whole time; and trying to get past that. So the dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling class, and in any epoch, these are the things that we all assume that we all sign up to (V12).

When hegemonic forms of power were considered, forms of political action resulted in engagement with the state. Three distinct groups emerged, discussed below.

Firstly, there was a small group of four, for whom the state was in *the background* in relation to practice. For this group, the state is the apparatus through which social policy and its subsequent funding for community development work is obtained. These policies, developed by those funders, set the parameters for practice and, for the most part, this small group of practitioners routinely complies with these policies. Practice as a form of political engagement *was not* a feature of work for these practitioners. Social change goals have a more individual or personally transformative essence, as opposed to structural social change.

The second group of 18 places much greater emphasis on the state and on people's relationship to the state, as political actors. Compared with those in the former group, the state is much more in *the foreground* of practice. Social change goals have a more socially transformative essence, aiming for democratic equality.

Furthermore, this second group displays features that can be located within two broad groups. In the first group, political action is primarily in the purview of *the practitioner*, while in the second group, political action is primarily in the purview of *community members or citizens*. Both these groups can be considered as interested in progressive politics, that is, committed to interventions having a *reform* agenda (Aly 2010). The next two sections discuss this second group, those for whom practice is a form of political action and whose practice relates to this framework. Democratic equality, through processes of advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups, is discussed first, followed by democratic equality through processes of citizen participation.

7.5.2 Structural Practice through Advocacy

Pluralism, as a form of political action, is one of the classical theories of the democratic state. It stresses “the beneficial consequences of social and cultural diversity, of having many different institutions, values, groups and ways of life” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:35). It also stresses having “multiple influences within and upon policy making, and in particular the role played by diverse organised interest groups” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:33). Several examples of community development work that could be considered as ‘organised interest groups’ have been discussed previously. However, the two that have been particularly

effective in achieving goals have involved advocacy efforts through state-wide networks. Pluralist authors stress the importance of networks or ‘policy committees’, which hold power in a policy-making context (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). As a form of networked governance, that is, “the production of collective outcomes” in the context of public problems, interest groups’ input into policy-making processes can be influential (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:142).

The “deliberative democracy” literature also discusses participation in policy-making. It is an example of governments focusing on the democratic right of citizens to be directly involved in decisions that affect their lives, and takes the form of consultation processes through focus groups, deliberative polling and citizens’ juries (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007). Maddison and Denniss (2009:214) argue that, “in a democratic policy process, the determination of public policy outcomes should be seen as an ongoing process in which debate, deliberation and even dissent are constitutive elements”. To achieve political equality, it is necessary to ensure that the voices of “disadvantaged minorities” or “unpopular” groups are heard, particularly if those policies affect those peoples’ lives (Maddison & Denniss 2009:214).

The following quotes demonstrate this approach to political action. V10 and V4, who are members and leaders within a network, are attempting to influence the state about the value and role of neighbourhood houses.

What *I have* noticed is that there seems to be a greater level of conservatism, so again....it’s a politicisation, radicalisation (that is needed), effectively, of the sector. It’s getting a really clear understanding of the political process and that is that pluralist stuff (V10, original emphasis).

We took the sector from a small insignificant little blip, in the Department of Human Services that didn’t fit anywhere, and I suppose we made ourselves part of the introduction of serious social policy in Victoria....I believe that was a strong community development practice that made a massive structural change; at the political level (V4).

V4’s story was told in Chapter Six, Story # 11, *A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level*. This is an example of practitioner-led political action to create

infrastructure, which then mobilised local level organisations to advocate for resources for the neighbourhood house sector. Their approach suggests an analysis; that by strengthening these networks, greater public participation and citizenship is enabled through neighbourhood centre participation. The promise of community member participation is inherent in this framework.

The aspiration of always being relevant, acknowledged and valued. As a field, as a sector, and I guess also, its ability to transform people's lives in lots of different ways, because it does do that (V4).

The other network story told in Chapter Six, # 5 *Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform*, was about a state-wide network successful in reforming a social policy by advocating for the needs of people from CALD backgrounds. This too was a practitioner-led piece of work, where people's stories were collected and used in a policy advocacy process.

So now there's been some headway with the Minister saying that each state department should provide some way for funded organisations to access interpreters, with the resources and systems for that. I mean that's been such a huge issue and there has actually been a change (Q1).

These stories were the only two clear examples given at interview about outcomes of structural change employing this type of approach to political action. This approach can be seen as a form of pluralism, one looking to influence the state by being competitive alongside other interest groups who also wish to influence the state.

As a political theory, pluralism was "shaken to the core" in the mid-twentieth Century, with political events such as the rise of "market liberalism" and "unprecedented civil unrest" (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:52). From the 1960s, groups on the political margins rejected pluralism as a form of traditional politics. At this time, civil rights and anti-war activists, radical environmentalists and feminists set the scene for several decades of radical politics and unprecedented civil unrest (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:55).

This critique from activists was also reflected in community development theory and was discussed in the literature review in Chapter Three. Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009:154) discuss how pluralism as a theory of the democratic state is faring in these contemporary times.

Pluralism today grapples with the realities of concentrated business power, corporatist partnerships, the influence of technical expertise in policy making, large and complex states and network and multi-level governance.

With all these forces playing out in the political arena, it was not surprising the majority of practitioners struggled to give an account of the transformation of powerful structures as a result of community development. V11's response about practice efficacy in this regard is a good illustration:

Very seldom; because they are bulky and heavy, cumbersome to move. They don't have the agility for transformation. They also think that because they are so big, they will be impervious to changes, more protected (V11).

This was an area about which practitioners spoke in very *aspirational* terms, seeking equality and justice by working to transform institutions and their policies causing oppression. However, this section has shown the validity of advocacy as an approach to social change. The main vehicle for this type of structural work has been networks of practitioners engaged in advocacy work and, in a small number of cases, their reform agenda has been effective.

For six other practitioners, their reform agenda includes ideas of political action through citizen participation. Two from this group work outside the social service sector, and four work within the sector. They, too, are seeking social change to bring about democratic equality, but do so through citizen participation.

7.5.3 Structural Practice through Citizen Participation

Despite global democratization in which, for the first time in history, the majority of people live in more or less liberal democracies, Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009) assert, there has been a failure to acknowledge that a deeper expression of democracy is needed. Because liberal

democracies have failed to live up to their democratic ideals, reform agendas associated with democratic renewal seek more authentic democracy (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:334). Authenticity of democracy, they argue, is “the degree to which popular control is substantive rather than symbolic, engaged by critical, reflective and competent citizens” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:209).

Four practitioners are placing emphasis on this kind of political engagement in their approach to community development practice.

Everything we do is political. So any kind of citizen is a politician, or needs to be a politician; I believe in that. I’m not satisfied with the amount of practice of that (V11).

If you are doing structural community development, you are going to work for change at several different levels, and you are going to influence the democratic process (Q7).

Owen and Westoby (2011) argue the task of developmental work is to create an interface between “the horizontal and the vertical” processes that mobilise “household-level relationships around structural or systemic” concerns. Their emphasis on forming developmental relationships and dialogue is key to this kind of civic participation.

V10 sees the potential for this kind of dialogical practice in spaces within neighbourhoods, and particularly the neighbourhood houses with which V10 works. The following quote shows analysis about how communities could be redressing hegemony.

We *don’t* have the alternative conversations. Hegemony...‘how does that actually happen’? ‘What are the mechanisms’? So, for me, neighbourhoods are a brilliant site for those alternative conversations to occur, and where they give rise to action, so much the better (V10, original emphasis).

V10 laments the lack of “alternative conversations” about ways in which hegemonic power seeps into daily life. V10’s suggestion, “and where they give rise to action”, is the critical point to this discussion on civic participation. It begs the question about why more civic participation is not occurring. One explanation was introduced in an earlier section of this chapter, where the term “technocracy” was introduced and defined as control by outside

experts, particularly those we see in the widespread “service economy” (Boyte, 2008). The great challenge of our time, Boyte (2008) argues, is to develop a civic agency politics as an alternative to technocratic politics. This is a politics in which people are not empowered by leaders, but empower themselves when they develop skills and habits of collaborative action, and change institutions and systems, making them more supportive of civic agency (Boyte, 2008).

Boyte (2008) goes on to make a subtle, yet significant distinction between the practices of “mobilizing” and “organizing”, asserting professionals characteristically learn to ‘mobilise’; they seek to activate groups around goals and objectives they have determined in advance. This approach fails to address complex problems requiring work across lines of difference, public judgment and imaginative collective action (Boyte, 2008). The top-down emphasis of mobilising leaves governance and economic systems unchanged, (Boyte, 2008). However, the bottom-up, alternative view is one of citizenship, where people exercise their civic agency and are co-creators to solve problems and co-create public goods, things of lasting civic value (Boyte, 2008).

The clearest example of this approach to practice was discussed in Chapter Six, in Q7’s Story # 6 – *Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work*. This was the story of the ATSI Solidarity group where Indigenous and non-Indigenous members work against racism and to advance Indigenous culture. With a ten-year history, this group focuses on creating a space for group members to educate each other, deliberate together, and make decisions together about a range of actions they undertake each year. This group makes structural connections when building relationships with government bureaucrats, academics and others who represent diverse groups within the wider community. This is a good example of community development as civic participation. It is a community member-led approach; therefore, in Boyte’s (2008) terminology, is an example of Q7’s practice as ‘organising’, not ‘mobilising’.

As stated earlier, only three practitioners prior to being directly asked at interview raised the concept of citizenship. One of those comes from this group, Q3, who explained why citizenship is crucial for community development, and makes suggestions about the paucity of thinking around the concept.

Many of the structures and processes of democracy and citizenship have been eroded by neo liberalist drivers (for example, loss of the 'local' from local Government, the loss of support for small community organisations in favour of larger organisations). People have become more and more dislocated from relationships, organisations and democratic processes that can carry their voice.

So citizenship is about politicization. Citizenship is an automatic right or condition that is under-utilised, but community development can support people to act like the citizen they already are. To be more active citizens and therefore influence decisions that affects their lives, communities, livelihoods, workplaces and circumstances (Q3, Stage Two).

Q3 is suggesting why community members have become depoliticized. The role of a community development process is one to support citizen participation in politics. Later, reflecting on the field of community development in relation to practitioners' knowledge base, Q3 commented that this kind of political science emphasis should be fundamental to community development training as a formative knowledge base for citizenship-making practice.

This section has discussed democracy as a movement that encourages direct participation of individuals in decisions affecting their own lives (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007; Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009; Maddison & Dennis 2009). Community development can be a vehicle for such participation, particularly as it pertains to reform agendas, although, the number of examples of this discussed at the interviews were few.

A final view of practice as political action was discussed by three participants at interview and is one that does not fit in with the previous continuum of practitioner-led advocacy and community member-led civic participation. This is where engagement with the state is abandoned for more alternative ways to alleviate oppression. These methods *do not aim* to change the structures of the state. These are discussed below as, working beyond the state.

7.5.4 Structural Practice Beyond the State

With a structural analysis about oppression, practitioners and the people with whom they work may engage in processes with a reform agenda. However, there were circumstances discussed where people facing an unenviable dilemma and become aware the state will not reform oppressive policies. At these times, pragmatically, a more subversive approach, using alternative ways of working is undertaken. In these instances, political action can be viewed as “claimed spaces” where people gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of institutionalised policy arenas (Gaventa 2006).

They actually evolve the alternative from the bottom-up (V1).

I hold the tension between mutuality and hierarchy. I engage with the state to a point. I stop when hierarchy displaces mutuality. Then I look to set up alternatives to those readily seen within the state apparatus where people can more freely develop the reciprocity that is essential to a healthy sense of community (Q10, Stage Two).

Stories about alternative practice were told in Chapter Six - Story # 3, *Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations* and Story # 4, *Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action*. These were from two practitioners of the group of three not working in the social service sector. One could argue these practitioners have more freedom to work in alternative ways, being located outside the apparatus of the state. However, even for others located within the social service sector, degrees of subversion were a feature of their practice. For example, Q1 told the story of a small network of education and training providers with whom Q1 works, educators who provide literacy classes. They operate within a very constrained context, where Government narrowly defines parameters for operation.

They are quite funny, at meetings they say “oh, don’t minute this”; or “this is off the record”. But their funding has been more and more restricted about who they can actually provide literacy classes to. Some providers have obviously decided to toe the line of the federal Government. (But this network) they’ve all done alternative practices. Their philosophy is that if someone needs literacy, it’s a fundamental human right (Q1).

Q1 went on to talk about the various alternative practices in which the network members engage, where ways of operating ensure community members benefit from literacy programs. In some cases, there are avenues for creativity because the complexity of the system is such that loopholes present themselves when government officials themselves cannot understand the system. These alternative practices are subversive because they originate from a values base common to the educators around equality, justice and education, and are enacted despite the funding regulations. Their desire to have open discussion that is “off the record” shows their high sense of trust with other network members, their sense of comradeship and their commitment to education for all.

In summary, this section on practice as political action has discussed a small number of social change processes practitioners use to work towards democratic equality. It has shown that structural community development is inextricably linked to politics. Even processes set up as alternative systems outside of the state apparatus, or subversively claimed within the state apparatus, seek empowerment for community members, contributing to their democratic agency.

During the second stage of the data collection process participants at both group meetings were asked to consider the critical issues that either help or hinder their attempts to engage in structural community development. To elicit this data I employed a nominal group technique where participants wrote down and discussed their top three answers. At both meetings, the need for communities of practice to be established was raised by all participants, to strengthen the knowledge base of the practice. Many other participants raised these same issues at their interviews. This, and another implication for practice is discussed in the next section.

7.6 Implications for Structural Practice

This section discusses two implications for structural practice that emerged from the data – that communities of practice be established to build the knowledge base about this form of practice, and also, the idea that practitioners need to sustain themselves through long social change processes.

7.6.1 Communities of Structural Practice

Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue there is an urgent need to build the knowledge base about working with communities in Australia. The practitioners in this study also raised this as an issue at the consensus conference groups. Developing a deeper understanding about contemporary practice was discussed as a hindrance for structural community development, as this knowledge development is not given enough emphasis by the field. This sentiment is exemplified by the following two quotes.

I don't think we allow ourselves the time to reflect or to actually think through the processes that we may or may not be doing. But otherwise, I don't see how people can actually move forward (VM4).

There isn't a common understanding, or a common usage of that language; something about language and analysis there (QM3, original emphasis).

Participants also discussed issues associated with the dominance of a service delivery culture for those working in the social service sector. This becomes problematic because other forms of practice dominate and there is a perception that this weakens the potential for community development. The sentiment that development practitioners are often working very differently from their non-community development colleagues was raised. For example,

I described myself before as the salmon that's swimming upstream and everyone else is going in the opposite direction (QM8).

In my team, in my workplace, I'm the only CD worker. I'm always *explaining* why I'm doing certain things (QM7, original emphasis)

The service delivery culture makes people that are working in community development articulate their work within a totally different framework and a framework that is often the *antithesis* to the method, to the work they are doing. So, it's sort of constantly undoing it. And it isolates people (QM3, Stage Two, original emphasis).

QM3 believes dominant forms of practice are the antitheses of community development. Having processes that assist practitioners to reflect on practice would contribute to their analysis about the effectiveness of their work and perhaps give greater credence to the practice type. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:119) suggest a deeper understanding of practice entails exploring a set of practices helping practitioners move from the ‘tacit’, that is, doing what just comes naturally, to the ‘explicit’, where community work demonstrates an ongoing and integrated system of personal history, knowledge, skills, experiences and values woven by community workers into all aspects of practice.

It seems crucial to establish communities of practice, where individual practitioners can reflect together on results they are getting from their work and build the collegial knowledge base of practice. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:124) discuss this as the establishment of “co-operative inquiry” groups, ways to understand practice more deeply and develop a collective analysis about trends and issues, and effective ways of responding to those.

This, however, raises two other issues. Firstly, the small cohort of community development practitioners in Australia, a relative minority compared to other fields of practice in the social service sector. Secondly, the large geographic areas in which practitioners are located across regions. Both these realities make it difficult for practitioners to connect with others doing similar work.

Familiar with these realities for Australian practitioners, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) discuss contemporary opportunities for practitioner connection through the use of social networking and other on-line tools. Combining the functionality of on-line tools with semi-formal and formal processes of co-operative enquiry seems to be the best combination of strategies to achieve better practice. The structural nature of practice, described as engaging at societal levels beyond the local, seems to warrant networks of peer analysis beyond just those found in localised geographical contexts.

Two of the factors that contributed to practitioners’ high theory-action congruency are described here. Firstly, the extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work resulting in reasonable expectations about outcomes. Secondly, having an action-research mindset, which allows practitioners to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development. This suggests, therefore, that the

establishment of communities of practice would contribute to greater effectiveness for structural community development practitioners. They could serve as sites for collective knowledge generation and ways in which practitioners could gain support for their work.

Another issue raised by participants relates to the ability for practitioners to sustain themselves throughout the long-term nature of social change work. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

7.6.2 Sustaining Self for Structural Practice

Three ideas emerged from the data relating to practitioners sustaining themselves. Firstly, the idea that the work is long-term was raised. For example,

I don't think seven years is long enough with Indigenous people because their history is too long. I don't have too many good news stories to tell there because I think we're looking at probably another *100* years (to make a difference) (Q6, original emphasis).

Secondly, the ideas that, through day-to-day interactions with people, a great number of issues are presented, and it is not possible to work on them all. Q7's example below, demonstrates strategic thinking about what issues will be acted upon. Q7 understands that influencing change is a lengthy process and Q7 would rather be effective in *some* areas, compared with being less effective in *more* areas. For example,

There's never a shortage (of issues) to engage in. I am trying to not pick up too many project opportunities because your work becomes more diluted and you're less likely to develop a thought-through action around how you can influence change (Q7).

Thirdly, the idea was raised that this work can be personally challenging or taxing because of its activist nature and reform agenda. For example,

You can't expect a nice, gracious, gentle occupation in community development. You're a front-line soldier (V11).

The way we were taught community development, it was very much an activist model, and I really tried to follow it very sincerely, but I think fighting so much can make you quite ill. I've come to realise now if you want to be in this field you have to *first* look after yourself, and then, try to do whatever you can, and just be happy for whatever small changes you can make (V5, original emphasis).

All of these ideas, the long-term nature of the work, not taking on too many issues for action, and knowing the extent to which activism can be personally challenging, speak to the idea of sustaining self for structural community development work.

Another factor for high theory-action congruency is practitioners' perseverance through lengthy processes. Many spoke of the rewarding nature of this work, when processes of empowerment enable participants to achieve things in their lives they could not have achieved before their involvement in community development processes. These stories, though, were matched with many other stories in which work involved struggle and challenge. Despite this, the long-term commitment to community development as a form of social change was evident amongst the cohort in this study.

Sustaining oneself for the 'long haul' is an area given limited consideration in the community development literature. Ife and Tesoriero (2006) argue long-term commitments to the work are acknowledged as necessary because social change is not something achieved quickly. This longevity can be threatened by the stresses associated with practice (Kenny 2011), requiring strategies to manage stress; or, as Shields puts it, ways in which practitioners can keep "sparking without incinerating" (1991:119).

A helpful perspective may be to view practice more as an unfolding journey. Kaplan (1996) emphasised development practice as a living process, or an art, one demanding imagination, flexibility and the ability to work with ambiguity and contradiction. To come close to the essence of the concept of development requires a journey of exploration, Kaplan (1996) argued. In a later work, he wrote,

As development practitioners, we must plunge ourselves into the ongoing story of the social organism as it is being lived, make sense of it as it unfolds, and build within

ourselves sufficient depth of resource that we may be prepared to offer an appropriate and responsive intervention when necessary. Rather than rigid planning and the assembling of tools and techniques, what is required of the competent social practitioner is rigorous preparation, and the building of surplus inner resources (Kaplan 2002: 160-161).

Kaplan (1996) argued that, to understand development one needs to acknowledge that development is a life process, never static or complete. This idea gives credence to the thinking of practitioners, discussed earlier, about viewing social change as incremental; it is unfolding or ongoing. Inner resources to sustain oneself in an ongoing manner can be developed through the processes of the work themselves. As the exploratory journey of practice unfolds, it is strengthened by the quality of the relationships developed with community members and colleagues alike.

When responding to the final question asked at interview about the most exciting aspect of this work, Q3 talked about practice as a creative act. These acts include ongoing processes where, in relationship with community members, practice can be nourishing.

It's always about creativity. It's so nourishing, it's such a buzz when people you work with can be more of themselves in the world. Community development is about creating opportunities for the true expression of nature; and that's where all the power is connected to, and why there's so much power in people's dreams and visions; the human potential (Q3).

Ife and Tesoriero (2006) state that both personal and activist networks can support practitioners' long-term commitment to the work. Kenny concurs (2011:419), and places emphasis on peer networks when she advises a practitioner to "apply community development principles to yourself". Forms of collegial support and co-mentoring are sustaining and nourishing as comradeship is developed. Two other practitioners mirrored this sentiment,

What's critical is 'a base', somewhere that I can stand with colleagues who think similarly (QM9).

It's wonderful when I have fellow traveler, or two or ten. It warms my heart to have fellow travelers. When I see the field greening, germinating (V11).

This section has shown that practice requires long-term commitment to effect change. It has been suggested that viewing development work as a process that unfolds, or a journey to be explored, is a helpful way to think about practice. This thinking is likely to open up a myriad of opportunities for creative action. Practitioners, no doubt, develop a range of strategies to sustain themselves for lengthy periods, and those that have been highlighted include collective processes, where practitioners apply the principles of community development to themselves. This concerns relationships that are reciprocal and collegial in nature, providing a source of strength for practitioners and comradeship with others, as they engage in long-term social change endeavours.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored practitioners' frameworks of practice for structural community development. The three frameworks presented have distilled a number of key structural dimensions and collectively, they paint a complex picture of practice. These complexities exist on many fronts and include various analyses informing practice, shifting contexts for practice, and multiple stakeholder involvement in processes.

The chapter has shown there is no *one* approach for structural community development. Options for social change processes are open to imaginative and creative processes, emanating from the collective wisdom of those involved. However, some helpful and hopeful analysis contributing to greater practitioner agency was made in relation to the three frameworks presented. The framework *Structural Connecting* emphasised equality and empowerment as the kinds of social change being sought through practice. The framework *Structural Shaping*, showed experienced practitioners with a nuanced understanding of power are seeking incremental social change and have the highest theory-action congruency. The framework *Structural Politicking* illustrated community development as having an inextricable link to politics and is seeking democratic equality.

A critical reading of the individual frameworks presented showed social change outcomes

could benefit from greater emphasis being placed on some key dimensions over others, and also emphasised the inclusion of additional key dimensions once the frameworks were examined through theoretical perspectives in literature. Two implications for such practice were discussed, emphasising the importance of establishing communities of practice, and that practitioners need to sustain themselves for the long haul of structural practice.

The aim of this research is to provide a useful theory of structural community development for contemporary contexts. The discussion in Chapter Eight seeks to draw key lessons from the three findings chapters and also various concepts and themes found in various bodies of literature to enable the development of such a theory.

CHAPTER EIGHT - Discussion and Conclusion: Towards a Useful Theory of Structural Community Development

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion based on all the previous findings chapters and addresses the final research question: “What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?” In Chapter One, the Introduction, it was argued that there was a need for theorising “from below”. This Discussion and Conclusion chapter is the result of such theorising. In light of the findings, three main ideas are distilled: that structural community development is a multi-faceted theory; that a combination of frameworks signpost a particular model for structural community development; and if practice was to integrate these frameworks, this should have a bearing on practitioner theory-action congruency, and therefore the effectiveness of practice.

This research project employed an iterative approach (Blaikie 2010), whereby theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process (Mason 2002). A reflexive-dialectical perspective on practice attempts to find a place for the individual and the social, the objective and the subjective, within a broader framework of historical, social, and discursive construction and deconstruction (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). The twenty-two experienced practitioners involved in this study have offered signposts that are both helpful and hopeful about the possibilities for the transformative possibilities of community development, particularly as they relate to those who experience forms of oppression.

However, certain limitations and restrictions are inherent within all social research, including those relevant to this study, and because of these circumstances, the next section provides a critique of this research project. Keeping in mind the limitations discussed below, this research has made a contribution to furthering the knowledge base of community development, and this contribution is also discussed. Following this, the subsequent three

sections draw together knowledge from the study, which have been illuminated by theoretical concepts found in various bodies of literature. This chapter brings to fruition the framework of knowledge generation introduced in Chapter Four from Mikkelsen (2005), where knowledge can be viewed from empirical, constructionist and normative frames of reference. This chapter proposes a theory of structural community development, a normative model for practice, and its practical implications, reflecting practice in contemporary contexts. The chapter concludes with implications for further research and community development education as a result of this study.

8.2 A Critique of the Research Project

Limitations and delimitations specific to the research design and methods were discussed in Chapter Four, the Methodology chapter. There are three general limitations relevant to this study.

Firstly, this research has been exploratory in nature (Neuman 2011), seeking to search for meanings about a subject matter, structure, which is conceptually challenging due to its very omnipresence. A methodology seeking depth about a ubiquitous concept, at the expense of breadth, was utilised. While the findings from this research are not generalisable (Darlington & Scott 2002:17), they have aided the theory-building aim of this project.

Secondly, it needs to be acknowledged that there is an array of perspectives about community development's purpose, processes and outcomes. This orientation to community development, around structural dimensions of practice, will not have universal recognition. It has been my hope, however, that this perspective of community development will make a contribution to the literature and the field, one that is robust and can stand alongside other interpretations about practice.

Thirdly, research studies grow out of a particular time and place (Darlington & Scott 2002). The length of time taken from commencement to examination of a doctoral thesis, and the time for subsequent publications from that work to emerge, could span a number of years. Therefore, the perspectives of practitioners reported in this thesis reflected their perspectives made at the time. Further, the context of a fast-paced and evolving society means that the

conditions for practice expressed at the time of the data collection may be less applicable at the current time. However, the process of revisiting the literature towards the end of the research project to examine the most current writing in the field, particularly for the Australian context, indicated that conditions in practice contexts are similar to those when I commenced.

Therefore, although the findings from this study are not generalisable, they are transferable (Marshall & Rossman 2011). This means that the methods could be replicated in other practice theory-building contexts. The rigour employed throughout the study's various processes confirms a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity and, therefore, credibility (Patton 2002) about the results.

With the challenges and limitations discussed here and those relating to the research design discussed in the methodology chapter in mind, the remainder of this chapter discusses the research results in light of the literature, and as they relate to the aims of the research project. Structural community development is discussed in the following two sections as a multi-faceted theory and a normative model comprising three frameworks. The theory and model are a contribution to the knowledge base of community development because they have made sense of a highly elaborated concept, 'structure' (Lefebvre 2002), as it relates to practice. This study set out to explore how community development is redressing structural disadvantage, or how it can live up to its emancipatory potential, a proposition often made in the literature. It provides clarity about a diversity of structural concepts practitioners make meaning of, particularly as they face complex issues in contemporary contexts for practice.

8.3 Structural Community Development - a Multi-faceted Theory

The conceptual framework was outlined at the end of Chapter Three. This framework reflected the theoretical orientation at the commencement of this study and continues to be a helpful lens through which a theory of structural community development can be viewed. Based on analysis of the findings, it is apparent that a single understanding of structure cannot be made. Three distillations of structure contribute to a multi-faceted theory.

1. Structure can be thought about in relation to concepts of the *structural*, that is, the analysis practitioners have about *the diverse meanings of structure*.

2. Structure can be thought about in relation to *the act of structuring*, that is, the purposeful action undertaken, particularly as it relates to forming a base from which action is structured beyond the local level.

3. Structure can be thought about in relation to *the structured*, that is, the type of structures developed and maintained to hold community development work whilst it is in process.

These features are discussed in turn in the following three sub-sections.

8.3.1 The Structural - Diverse Meanings of Structure

A multi-faceted theory of structural community development includes the concept of *the structural*. Three sets of theoretical explanations can be used to illuminate this perspective. They include the following ideas: that the structural *bridges both objective and subjective meanings of structure*; that it draws on *modernist and postmodernist* theorising; and that its point of reference is *critical theory* and, within that theory, the philosophical tradition of *pragmatism* is drawn upon.

Taken as a metaphor, structure has diverse meanings. In Chapter Five, it was suggested that, when practitioners think of the concept of structure as a noun, systems of organisational and political structures were discussed as tangible objects. In the macro-sociological sense, this kind of thinking has synergies with structuralism, which emphasises macro structures in society and how these have primacy over the individual (Giddens 2009). However, the limits to this theory are exposed when one considers its deterministic nature (Bottero 2010), a stance challenged by the diversity within one's life, the many roles one plays in society and the multiple identities to which one may ascribe.

Chapter Five also showed how practitioners view structure from a symbolic interactionist stance, where concepts are perceived through subjective meaning-making and social interaction (Anderson & Taylor 2002). For example, when discussing behaviour associated

with community development processes, their analysis showed that practitioners viewed structure as collective meaning-making and agency. That is, by describing behaviour and processes as verbs, their analysis suggested their belief that structures can be acted upon. Therefore, this hopeful interpretation of practitioners' understanding of structure indicates that, despite any objective realities which may cause particular oppressive conditions for people who interact with structures, subjective realities can be utilised through community development to restructure those conditions.

These analyses also indicated that practitioners were implicitly drawing on what Burkett (2001) has previously discussed as both modernist and postmodernist viewpoints of community development. Burkett (2001) argued modernist interpretations of community and community practice are based on notions of fixity, objectivity and universalism, with fixed characteristics and spaces, objective structures and universalised ideals. However, postmodern interpretations of community development consider the processual and relational aspects of engaging with complexity in a more dynamic way (Burkett 2001). Practitioners undertake processes of *restructuring* by developing relationships with a range of people across systems, to effect change where and when it is possible.

These postmodern ideas are particularly pertinent, given the complexity of practice in contemporary contexts. Practitioners revealed a sophisticated understanding of community, one that attempts to harness the ideas found in Tonnies' (1887/2002) theory of *Gemeinschaft*, that is, types of bounded communities where people *commune* with each other, creating rich and deep forms of relationships to benefit the whole community (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). However, the practitioner analysis did not uncritically draw upon "nostalgic" visions of community from times gone by, nor those which "occlude difference, diversity and conflict" (Burkett 1998:346). Practitioners acknowledged the changing face of community in a world where new technological and other opportunities are emerging, all of which can be used in imaginative ways to develop a range of *communities*. New opportunities include embracing ideas of heterogeneous community; and these kinds of *re-visioning*, Burkett (2001) argued, can be seen as sites of *resistance* in the face of deleterious conditions of globalisation. Such postmodern theories, with an emphasis on dialectical thinking (Shaw & Martin 2000) and ideas of heterogeneity, identity and difference, provide new theoretical perspectives for structural community development.

Practitioners held a very hopeful analysis about how structures are both made and makeable through *structuration* (Joas & Knöble 2009:289, their emphasis). This analysis served as an antidote to practitioners' perceptions about structures being oppressive because of particular restrictive or oppressive policies they hold. Invoking Giddens' structuration theory harks back to what Joas and Knöble (2009:297) call Giddens' "anti-functionalist" stance, a stance that acknowledges that systems in society exist, yet power lies with actors and their ability to effect social change. Power, as a metaphor for structure, was explicitly discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4). At Stage Two of this research, a consensus was reached amongst the Queensland practitioners that a structural analysis of disadvantage necessarily comes first in processes of community development. This analysis positions them in their choice of work, the relationships they make and foster, and decisions they make about how to structure their work. Further, it was argued that a structural analysis is one that analyses power through a matrix of lenses. The Stage Two processes illustrated how practitioners examine the complex ways in which power exists in society. They analyse the conditions of their constituents' lives, both at the micro-level of daily life, and at the macro-level, where the political and societal milieu create the conditions of daily life.

When practitioners talked about unmasking power (Brookfield 2005) and making micro-level and macro-level connections, this can be considered an exercise in pragmatism. This concept was introduced in Chapter Five when discussing the Queensland Stage Two consensus conference group. Those practitioners agreed that a power analysis is fundamental to practice, and this analysis orients them to the kinds of social issues on which they choose to work. However, they also make judgments about what opportunities and constraints for action surround those social issues, and make pragmatic decisions about how to proceed in light of their judgments.

Goodman (1995) discusses the origins of the philosophical tradition of pragmatism and quotes William James (1975:259), who articulated pragmatism as the process of considering,

What effects of a conceivable practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare.

Pragmatism, from this perspective, stresses *results*, not origins. It emphasises the humanistic principle that ideas cannot be separated from the human contribution of organisation, interest

and selection (Goodwin 1995). In this pragmatist sense, community development processes are about people creating the kind of society in which they wish to live, and pragmatically seeking workable steps towards achieving this society. Chapter Five (Section 5.4.5) discussed data gained at Stage Two about how practitioners make pragmatic decisions in relation to the usefulness and workability of possible community development responses to situations. They weigh up opportunities and constraints in given situations and make judgments about what can be achieved.

As well as an emphasis on results, structural community development also considers the *origins* of processes, particularly those instigated because of a practitioner's structural analysis. In this context, the concept of pragmatism can be linked to critical theory in the data. Brookfield discusses four traditions of criticality, one of which is "pragmatist constructivism" (2005:15). Brookfield (2005) argues that pragmatism emphasises the importance of continuous experimentation to bring about better social forms. This kind of experimentation was seen in the data when practitioners referred to taking an action-research approach to their work. The stories told about the creation of new types of structures to achieve goals demonstrated they were not following prescribed steps. They had a mindset of experimentation, exploring a range of options and evaluating processes as they went along.

A pragmatic slant on critical theory also argues for "a defensible flexibility" (Brookfield 2005:17) regarding ways that critical values might be realised and encouraging a self-critical, and self-referential stance whilst affirming the creation of democratic forms of life. Brookfield cites Cornel West (1999), liberation theologian, philosopher, political commentator and neo-pragmatist (Cowan 2003; Goodman 1995), who understands pragmatism as a political form of cultural criticism and locates politics in the everyday experience of ordinary people (West 1999:151).

The emancipatory social experimentation that sits at the centre of prophetic pragmatist politics closely resembles the radical democratic elements of Marxist theory, yet its flexibility shuns any dogmatic, a priori or monistic pronouncements (West 1999:151-152).

West's view of pragmatism is to ensure the certitudes of critical theory never become reified or placed beyond healthy criticism and also, that people can:

Relate ideas to action by means of creating, constituting or consolidating constituencies for moral aims and political purposes (West 1999:146, cited in Brookfield 2005:18).

Brookfield (2005:31) argues that people using these processes need to recognise when an embrace of alternative views is actually supporting the status quo it appears to be challenging. This kind of critical examination and non-reification was evident in the data when power and structures in society were discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.1). Community development groups were acknowledged as possible micro-level sites in which oppression can occur. This is because they are situated within the broader global-political economy and, therefore, are impacted upon by factors resulting from such macro processes. The discussion on power and structures in society emphasised the importance of community development processes continually examining the power dynamics within groups and within structures created through community development, to ensure they do not inadvertently adopt oppressive practices. Therefore, the structural component of community development has links with critical theory. Group work processes enable critical thinking to generate a specific vision of the world as it *could* be while, at the same time, guarding against the adoption of oppressive practices to achieve those ends.

The practical and pragmatic elements of community development directly relate to the second feature of a multi-faceted theory – the act of structuring community development.

8.3.2 The Act of Structuring

A multi-faceted theory of structural community development includes the concept of *structuring*. Three elements from the findings relate to this area, including the idea that structuring is about *sustaining processes*; to be effective, the *locus of control for project decisions* needs to remain as close as possible to the people involved in the work; and that practice structures *beyond the local*.

As part of a theory of structural community development, the term is being used in a particular way whereby, with specific goals in mind, practitioners structure their work in

purposeful ways to achieve those goals. This involves making decisions about the work, such as particular people or organisations with whom to form relationships; the type of entity that is created or used to move the work forward; and processes to evaluate the effectiveness of this work as it is progressing.

In the first instance, with a structural analysis about power, practitioners seek to redress deleterious effects of oppression experienced by particular groups in society. Subsequently, structuring involves responding to those effects of oppression and developing and sustaining processes over time. This analysis comes about because of the nature and severity of issues faced by communities and the extended periods of time required to respond to these issues.

An example of this was discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.6), where a story was told of poor race relations between students in a high school, resulting in a high degree of conflict, violence, absenteeism and exclusions. The overall goal of the project was to reduce the inter-cultural conflict, in the hope that young people would get a better education and have every opportunity to advance their lives. The community development approach used an arts-based process to work with the young people and, over a two-year period, the school recorded a marked reduction in conflict, suspensions and exclusions. Furthermore, by employing an action-research methodology, the project was evaluated as it progressed, informing the various phases of the project and, therefore, making it more effective. The resulting analysis also included the need to continue to resource the project in order to further embed processes across the whole school setting, which would further consolidate the project's effectiveness. This type of structuring shows a shift in mode, from that of simply an action-research project to a more sustainable change, in which new processes were institutionalised in the everyday functioning of the school.

Further analysis about the effectiveness of this work relates to the locus of control to make project decisions, another element relevant to the act of structuring. In this case, although the project was resourced by government entities, the location of power and control over decisions was located with the people directly involved in the community development project group, but this is not always the case.

There is a 'top-down' / 'bottom-up' tension that exists when community development processes are funded by government. This was discussed as potentially problematic

throughout the interviews. Practitioners talked about priorities set by their employing organisations and priorities set by funding bodies who resource those organisations, and the subsequent tension this creates with workers who seek freedom to be responsive to community need as it arises. With funding contracts come set priorities and outcomes to be achieved by those in receipt of funding. In the high school example, it was shown that the practitioner telling the story was an employee of the main funder and thus had a significant degree of influence over funding. The practitioner, therefore, was able to ensure funding flexibility to take the project into whatever areas would increase its potential for effectiveness.

The story told of the Victorian federation of networks, discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.5), highlighted that significant funding had been obtained over a ten-year period to support the work of local neighbourhood houses across the state. Their aim is to ensure that, by resourcing local centres, community members will have local infrastructure to support local activities. They are attempting to hold in tension both the top down and bottom up dimensions of this work. That is, they are navigating the “structural dilemma” (Pearce 2010), both to receive funding from government and, with an analysis of power, create processes that allow just change to occur across communities.

The final structural component within a multi-faceted theory harks back to the sociological concept of making micro-macro connections and, in relation to structural community development, this involves structuring beyond the local. In Chapter Six, it was shown that 14 practitioners extended their practice beyond the local level. This approach to structuring is explicitly linked to their structural analysis about oppression and societal structures, hence the location of this work attempting to remedy forces of oppression at their source. Chapter Six also showed that if a practitioner’s framework of practice included community members as integral to all aspects of the structural practice, the degree to which work is ‘community-member led’ or ‘practitioner-led’ becomes a factor. A relatively low number of practitioners engaged in structural practice through citizen participation, six, in total, with only four of those working within the social service sector.

This aspect of practice, that is, making micro-macro connections, is one found in the literature, however, it is one that was seemingly problematic for practitioners when considering community members’ leadership or involvement in such processes. Practitioners

provided several explanations for this set of circumstances including, as discussed above, the centrality or peripheral location of citizens in *all aspects* of community development as part of a practitioner's framework of practice. Another explanation, exemplified by the Victorian neighbourhood houses network story discussed above, relates to the degree to which practitioners saw the building of infrastructure to enable bottom-up processes to occur as a necessary pre-condition for community development. Chapter Five (Section 7.3.4) discussed complications with assisting community members to form a community analysis and subsequent action. These were linked to levels of community member vulnerability, and the risk that community development processes could overburden people. A further explanation of why structuring beyond the local can be seen as problematic was discussed in Chapter Seven, in the section on citizen participation (Section 7.5.3). That discussion raised concerns about the way in which contemporary society tends to depoliticise citizens, reducing community members' analysis about structural factors that result in their own disadvantage.

Examples in the literature support these findings providing explanations for the lack of micro-macro structuring. Owen and Westoby (2011) emphasised practitioner skills and methods for structuring work, particularly micro-skills that form the basis for other work that connects "household-level relationships around structural concerns". Boyte (2008) emphasised the subtle difference between 'mobilising' and 'organising', where professionals characteristically seek to activate groups around goals and objectives that have been determined in advance. This speaks to 'top-down' ways of practicing, and also raises ideas about motivation and how people organise themselves in projects for which they see a need. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:19-22) provided further explanations regarding the impact of neo-liberalist and new managerialist ideologies on practitioners in funded social service contexts. Funded services, they argue, not only have a focus on pre-determined outputs and outcomes, but also generate a risk-avoidance culture that contributes to the lack of spaces for creativity and relationship-building endeavours with community members (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:19-22).

To summarise this sub-section, a multi-faceted theory of structural community development involves the act of structuring practice. Structuring includes the importance of sustaining processes over time, particularly around entrenched problems in communities. Structuring also includes holding in tension top-down and bottom-up drivers for the work, that is, where the locus of control for decision-making rests and how locating decision-making power as

close as possible to community activity should ensure its greater effectiveness. Finally, structuring work beyond the local level is another element. With an analysis of oppression, structural community development needs to be working to remedy such oppression at its source. It has been argued that these three structural dimensions together are required to effect change.

Ways to hold processes over time, or *the structured*, becomes another feature of the proposed theory and this is discussed in the next sub-section.

8.3.3 The Structured – Ways to Hold Processes Over Time

The final feature of a multi-faceted theory of structural community development involves the *structured*, that is, the type of structures developed and maintained to hold community development work as it proceeds. After public issues are identified and processes of relationship development begin, structures or entities are usually created or used to move the work forward. These structures provide a solid base from which community members and practitioners act.

Two main features of ways to hold processes over time emerged from stories told by practitioners. These relate to the processes of *creating solidarity with members* as a base for action, and processes of *making structural links with others* outside this group to build new relationships of solidarity.

Practitioners discussed, to a great degree, the first of these features, that is, creating solidarity with members. They often referred to processes of building trusting relationships through the creation of safe spaces, which provide a sense of mutuality for those involved. The feature ‘mutuality’ is significant because it encompasses the idea of reciprocity, the idea that people in the group share responsibility for the group’s development and action.

These processes would seem to be an antidote to what Boyte (2008) refers to as “technocracy”, discussed in Chapter Seven, in which professionals, when linked to a “service economy”, impede people’s civic development. This emphasis on safe spaces also reflects practitioners’ analysis of power. Practitioners told many stories of work where community

members' sense of identity was negatively shaped by processes of discrimination and labeling because of particular personal features they had or because of their particular life circumstances. The safe spaces that practitioners create reduce the effects of isolation and stigma resulting from such discrimination. These can be seen as processes of working with people to re-construct their identity in light of the group's collective analysis on these matters.

Stories told in Chapter Seven also showed practitioners supported processes of solidarity-building by placing emphasis on the creation of dialectical structures. Dialectical processes are those where multiple ideas are held in tension, where multiple forms of power are discussed and examined and yet, at the same time, members' *collective* analysis about responses to these processes is put into action. This is what Ledwith (2011) claims is community development's purpose, to tread the fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, one that has an emancipatory agenda.

The second, and related, feature to solidarity-building considers ideas of building relationships with others outside of community development groups. The data suggests that, while commitment to particular actions are underway, groups also create multiple pathways *into* the group or build new connections with the group. One of the stories told in Chapter Six, Story #6 about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Solidarity group, discussed both *task-oriented* features (to undertake particular actions) and *relationship-building* features through a myriad of consciousness-raising activities. This group purposively made links with people, organisations and governments, thus building momentum for the achievement of their goals. This group showed they were looking for enough synergies between existing actors and new or potential actors to create solidarity.

These relationship-building processes with people also draw on the idea of the dialectical. With heterogeneous groups, new ways of thinking are enabled because of the new relationships made. There would be no doubt that these provide both opportunities for growth and renewal, but also challenges because of the very difference that exists amongst actors. This kind of difference was highlighted with the story told in Chapter Six, Story #9, by the practitioner doing regional work in a mining area. That story provided an example where relationships were being continually built with others who, at the outset, seemed to

hold very different values from those of the members of the community development group. In this case, the emphasis was on an educative stance with people involved in the mining industry, whose primary motivations seemed to be economically driven. This work resulted in the consideration of social factors and impacts of this industry on local communities, and actions were developed to alleviate these impacts.

Participants discussed a range of different types of structures, from informal groups, formal organisations and networks. A number of salient warnings were made about their creation, including the importance of weighing up the risks associated with the act of progressing to greater degrees of formality. A concern noted was to ensure responsibilities associated with legal requirements for formal organisations do not overtake other actions, for example, those that were the motivation for collective action in the first instance.

This sub-section has shown that ways to hold processes over time are an important component of structural community development. While a structure to move the work forward and achieve goals is needed, it is also important to ensure solidarity amongst members is maintained, even when groups diversify their membership over time.

In conclusion, the previous three sub-sections have shown that structural community development is a multi-faceted theory with three components. Firstly, structural community development includes the intersubjective (Sharrock 2010:100), that is, the collective social processes that give rise to an understanding of how structure is constituted and how agency is developed. These are the collective social processes and relationship building that occurs when critically analysing, visioning and taking the practical steps to bring that vision into reality. It was argued that these processes should also be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating how power is produced and reproduced in both communities and in wider society. Secondly, the act of structuring, the second component of a multi-faced theory, included ideas about sustaining processes, the degree to which community groups have control of decisions, and also that structuring takes place beyond the local. Thirdly, the structures developed and maintained to hold such processes created the final component of a multi-faceted theory. This involved ensuring a sense of safety for participants and building solidarity with members, creating a base for their work.

The nature of structural community development, being about both visioning and enacting that vision, speaks to both constructivist and normative processes in which people engage. The following sub-section explores theoretical perspectives to explain these phenomena as concurrent processes in practice.

8.3.4 Holding Both the Constructivist and Normative Dimensions of a Theory Together

The previous sections revisited the distillations from the findings about the diverse meanings of structure, suggesting a multi-faceted theory. Practitioners both construct meanings of structure and create structure in their work. Therefore, this research has also shown that a theory of structural community development is one that holds in tension both constructivist and normative dimensions of practice. The constructivist refers to what could be happening, or how the world could be. The normative refers to what should be happening or how the world should be, and also how practitioners are creating norms regarding what they perceive to be the usual or correct way of doing things. This movement between the could and the should requires navigation through a range of tensions, which make for complexity, particularly when one considers the nature of trans-local work, that is, work making micro-macro or micro-structural connections.

Structure as ‘meaning-making processes’ and structure as ‘action to create structure’ require a reflexive loop. The constructivist element of theorising requires imagination to think about structure differently, that is, ways in which it is not deterministic or ideologically unjust. However, Brookfield (2005) and West (1999), whose theorising was discussed earlier in this chapter, made points about action or the reification of particular theoretical perspectives that can exacerbate or actually perpetuate injustice and oppression if not uncritically examined. Therefore, reflexivity is needed to examine situations from a range of theoretical perspectives, otherwise stagnation, the status-quo, or the repetition of practice that perpetuates the most essentialising elements of structure may remain.

Two examples of this kind of reflexivity were discussed in Chapter Six. Story # 8, concerned a group who formed a regional cooperative. This group aimed to be qualitatively different from other kinds of regional entities they had known, that is, those comprised of local organisations that had amalgamated and lost their ability to be effective locally. Through

their innovative cooperative structure, they have strengthened the individual positions of each organisation and have remained responsive and locally-relevant. This level of responsiveness attests to their commitment to both the development of disparate local communities and of the wider region, through their collaborative efforts as a formal co-operative. Story # 3, concerned a network that developed dual structures, one that holds informal elements of a network which they believe fosters mutuality and inclusivity, and a parallel auspice organisation with the legal status to enable various activities of the network. Both of these examples indicate that members hold particular values, and use imagination to think about structure in ways that reflect those values. In both these cases, they have formed and maintained structures in spite of more traditional or dominant ways of structuring their entities. They are navigating complexity when attempting to hold a number of factors in tension, and in the case of the former, are making micro-macro connections when structuring beyond the local level.

Kaplan (1996) provides some helpful theorising in relation to this discussion about holding the constructivist and normative dimensions of practice together. He wrote about the failings of development practice and called for a new stance, or a form of development practice that is about new ways of thinking and being in the world (Kaplan 1996). Kaplan posited that, if it is true that the development of people refers primarily to evolving consciousness, any description of the development process necessarily entails the idea of “emergent consciousness” (1996:68).

Individually, organisationally and socially, development implies the emergence of a new way of being in the world; a new thinking (Kaplan 1996:68).

This line of argument seems pertinent, particularly in relation to the examples provided above, where practitioners are consciously building new kinds of structures. They think about the goals they are seeking and they create the structures they need to enable the fulfillment of those goals.

Kaplan emphasised the ability to work with opposites constructively and draw creatively from tension and conflict, what he names as “consciously-balanced action”, and to cultivate “three-fold thinking – the unity of opposites in a greater whole” (Kaplan 1996:80-81). This process, Kaplan (1996:80) argued, includes awareness of consequences and implications of

actions, the ability to forge new meaning in the absence of rules and given norms and, thus, the capacity for self-reflection (Kaplan 1996:80).

The ability to forge new meaning in the absence of rules is particularly pertinent to this study. What was heard, time and again, in the stories of practitioners was that their development practice was forging new ground. The regional co-operative story, referred to above, concluded with the practitioner asking rhetorical questions about the efficacy of their structuring work. This is exactly the kind of awareness and meaning-making process to which Kaplan is referring. Many stories told by practitioners suggested the development process is an exercise in the unknown. That is, it creates new realities, new types of structures and, because of this newness, groups make rules up as they go, in-situ. The rules they create directly relate to their construction of the world-as-it-could-be, and their ongoing work involves the processes of bringing that vision into reality.

In conclusion, a multi-faced theory of structure also fosters new imaginations of structure – those held in tension between the constructed and the normative, those that liberate or emancipate, and those that do not perpetuate or create new forms of oppression. Structure as a metaphor may symbolize the objective, the real, and that which represents essentialism, individuality, and overburdening responsibility. Alternatively, creativity in the midst of complexity, such as the type of complex processes needed to respond to the concerns of people discussed in this study, could benefit from three-fold thinking. This is thinking that encompasses both sides of an oppositional debate, or what Kaplan (1996) eloquently describes as the attempt to achieve unity through diversity. Further ways to act creatively in the midst of complexity can be viewed in terms of models for practice. Blaikie (2010:154) argues that abstract descriptions generated from everyday accounts can formulate ideal types (Kim 2008). Referring to Weber's (1958) depiction of an ideal type of the Protestant work ethic, Blaikie preferences the construction of ideal types that involve "abstract second-order descriptions", that is, models (2010:156). The everyday accounts of community development practitioners have been used to suggest a model for practice. The model has been developed from the integration of the three frameworks presented separately in Chapter Seven. These, held together, could be considered a normative model for a theory of Structural Community Development.

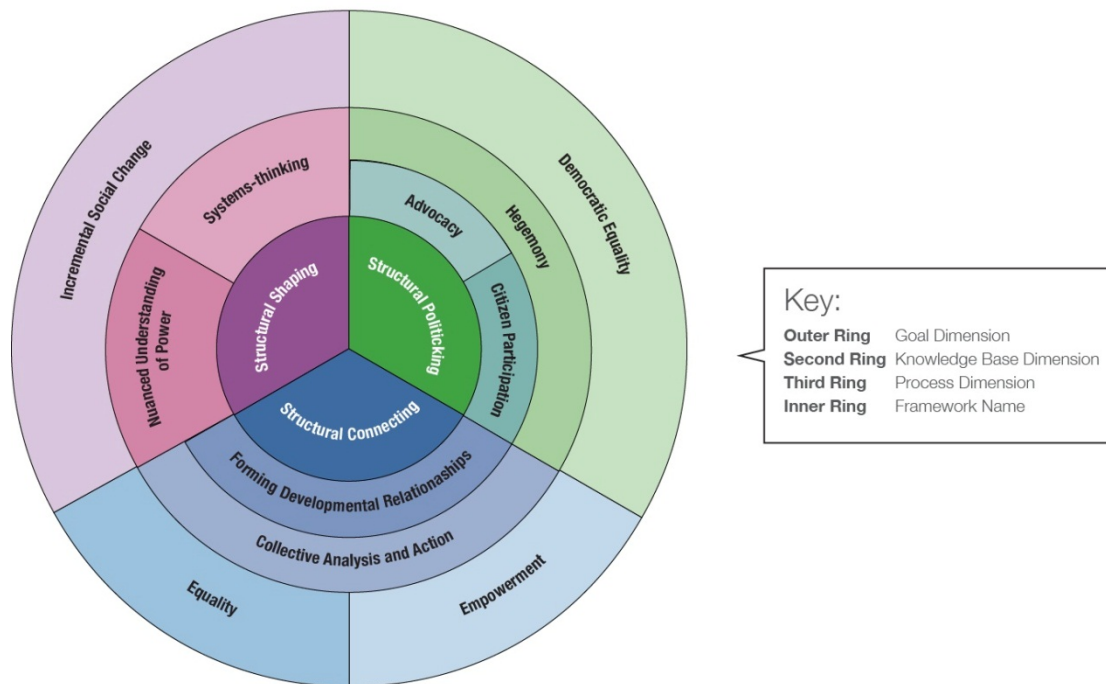
8.4 A Model of Structural Community Development

Chapter Seven answered two research questions. The first related to frameworks of practice that emerged from the data. The second determined which aspects of those frameworks were more likely to create theory-action congruency and, hence, increase the effectiveness of practice. Practitioners use frameworks to make sense of and organise their work. Frameworks are comprised of concepts, known as “key dimensions”, and these dimensions relate to one another in particular ways. Three distinct organising frameworks were presented in Chapter Seven. They included:

1. Dimensions that all practitioners in the sample have in common, which is called *Structural Connecting*.
2. Dimensions that provide the greatest theory-action congruency amongst the sample, which is called *Structural Shaping*.
3. Dimensions that showed the greatest degree of divergence amongst the sample around how the work is seen as political engagement. The divergence involves the degree to which work is practitioner-led or community-member / citizen-led, which is called *Structural Politicking*.

Together, the frameworks can be represented diagrammatically. See (Figure 11) below. They are a visual representation of the three frameworks in one diagram. Each framework is independent of the others.

Figure 11: The Three Frameworks



The next three sub-sections revisit the key dimensions of these frameworks. The lens to revisit these frameworks relates to the discussion in Chapter Six on theory-action congruency, theorised by Argyris and Schön (1974). It was argued in that chapter that there are contextual factors linked to theory-action congruency, and when these are viewed in light of the various frameworks, they make an argument for a theory of structural community development. Before that discussion, however, the three frameworks are re-introduced in the next three sub-sections.

8.4.1 Structural Connecting

The first framework, *Structural Connecting*, highlighted the collective nature of this work and articulated four key dimensions to which all participants related as agents of social change. They included: the creation of *developmental relationships*; the creation of *community analysis and action*; and goals around *equality* and *empowerment*. The formation of developmental relationships are those characterised by experiences of mutuality, such as seen in Buber's (1937) theory of 'I-Thou', which valorizes communication as *communion*.

The structural nature of these relationships supported ideas from Owen and Westoby (2011) about the “purposeful” nature of developmental relationships, which lay the foundation for “pragmatic strategy”, that is, the instrumental focus of collective action. When discussing “mandate”, Owen and Westoby (2011) raised issues about the degree to which practice is conducted *with* community members, that is, the motivations and interests of community members, compared with more directive emphases in which practitioners privilege organisational imperatives. Creating conditions for the establishment of a *community analysis*, leading to collective action, was discussed as an area that seemed most problematic for some practitioners.

Social change, as an overall aim of community development, was discussed in terms of creating a more egalitarian society, as well as processes of empowerment for participants of groups. A distinction was made between these two emphases, based on the degree to which participants viewed community development as addressing the root causes of oppression, that is, the reason people become disadvantaged in the first instance.

In summary, *Structural Connecting* is about the formation of developmental relationships and the subsequent collective analysis established with members of groups, which creates circumstances leading to collective action. The action undertaken is either working towards the greater goal of structural change, such as creating more egalitarian societies, or the greater goal of the ongoing empowerment for people involved in community development processes.

8.4.2. Structural Shaping

The second framework, *Structural Shaping*, highlighted that *structures can be acted upon*. This framework articulated three key dimensions. They included: *a nuanced understanding of power*; the need for *systems-thinking*; and the goal of *incremental social change*. The practitioners who drew from these dimensions also drew from the dimensions in the previous framework, *Structural Connecting*. However, this idea, that practice has the ability to shape context rather than context always shaping practice, was the key feature of this framework. The goal of incremental social change reflects the long-term nature of processes, which are often subject to change as new analyses and new opportunities for action emerge.

A nuanced understanding of power, as a key dimension of this framework, showed that practitioners draw from postmodern interpretations about power, where power is viewed from various dimensions of space, level and form (Gaventa 2006). Having the ability to analyse and harness power across these dimensions simultaneously, Gaventa (2006) argues, leads to transformative, fundamental change.

In their use of systems-thinking, practitioners showed they were thinking about the system as connected, both horizontally and vertically. The challenge for this type of thinking, Wheatley (2006) argues, is to step back far enough to appreciate how fragments of the whole move and change as a coherent entity. Moreover, inherent in this theorising is the idea that the system is capable of solving its own problems. Therefore, new realities are co-created as participants make “critical connections” through webs of relations (Wheatley 2006:45).

In summary, *Structural Shaping* analyses power in a range of ways. This, coupled with systems-thinking, provides a degree of agency to shape or effect structural change as multiple avenues for action are considered across the system. Incremental change is the type of change being sought, where processes involve moving forward towards goals, yet remain open to the numerous possibilities that may emerge through ongoing reflection and collective analysis.

8.4.3 Structural Politicking

The third framework, *Structural Politicking*, emphasised that structural community development is about *political engagement*, particularly as it relates to the apparatus of the state. This framework featured three key dimensions, including the concept *an analysis of hegemony* and two divergent process dimensions where practitioners either influence through *advocacy*, or are involved in processes of working with community members, that is, *citizen participation* in political engagement. The overall goal of this dimension was *democratic equality*. As with the framework *Structural Shaping*, the practitioners who drew from these *Politicking* dimensions also drew from those presented in the first framework, *Structural Connecting*.

Politics is a factor in this framework primarily because the role of the state was very much in the foreground for the majority of practitioners. They saw themselves as political actors in the context of the state.

Hegemony, a key dimension in this framework, is defined as a process where a dominant group exercises control over other social groups (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) original theorising, hegemony explains the subtle way in which dominant attitudes become 'common sense' or internalised. This is a process that marginalises or silences groups (Ledwith & Springett 2010). With this analysis, practitioners sought to increase democratic equality through greater citizenship. Their work aims to ensure that people's views, especially those not normally considered by powerful structures, can have greater political impact.

In a "pluralistic" sense (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:33), practitioners tended to engage in practitioner-advocacy about, or on behalf of, marginalised groups. Therefore, there is a sense that this practice is about *inclusion*, demanding the state include or consider particular groups in society more equally. However, practitioners' sense of efficacy in this realm of structural practice was low, as they tended to speak in very aspirational terms about the impact of their advocacy.

If structural practice was seen as a process for activating citizenship, then citizen participation and engagement became the key process for achieving democratic equality. This is the kind of politics in which people are not empowered by leaders, but empower themselves when they develop skills and habits of collaborative action (Boyte 2008). This allows them to change institutions and systems, making them more supportive of civic agency (Boyte 2008).

In summary, with an analysis of hegemony, political engagement or politicking, was seen as a form of structural practice. This practice is one that works towards democratic equality through either practitioner advocacy or activating citizen engagement.

The degree to which this, and the other frameworks presented, should be incorporated into a theory of structural community development can be theorised through the lens of theory-action congruency. The next sub-section revisits the discussion in Chapter Six regarding

Argyris and Schön's (1974) theorising about the effectiveness of professional practice and then makes links with the three frameworks discussed above.

8.4.4 Theory-Action Congruency and the Three Frameworks

Chapter Six (Section 6.2), discussed Argyris and Schön's (1974:21-23) contention that competence is based on congruency between a practitioners' "espoused theories", or what they say they do, and their "theories-in-use", or their actual action. Through that lens, the data suggested a number of incongruities when practitioners discussed responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work (espoused theory), and the stories they told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose (theories-in-use). When examining the data, a number of problematic circumstances emerged and it was posited that these could explain this lack of congruency. The factors included:

- The practitioner's organisational base and its mandate at levels beyond the local or within the broader sector;
- The amount of infrastructure that exists or is created and used as vehicles to take agendas forward, and to influence;
- The extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work and have reasonable expectations about outcomes;
- The length of time it takes to effect change and their perseverance through lengthy processes;
- The extent to which practitioners have an 'experimental' or 'action-research' mindset, which allows them to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development.

As discussed in Chapter Six, when analysing the data, I allocated the research participants a low-congruency/high-congruency rating, based on these factors.

Eight practitioners demonstrated low congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice. It was suggested that the low rating was attributed to particular issues, such as: having multiple roles; lack of practice experience; issues directly related to their employing organisation; or, their geographic isolation.

Fourteen practitioners demonstrated high congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice. The higher congruency was attributed to particular circumstances, such as: having training in community development practice; having considerable work experience in and knowledge of the social service system; or choosing to work on a narrow range of issues over long periods of time. This latter factor stands in contrast to work conducted in place-based settings, for example, in neighbourhood centres or in regional areas, where many and diverse issues pertinent to those communities are responded to in practice. Furthermore, three practitioners in this high congruency group are working voluntarily, that is, outside the social service system. They are creating community-owned networks and organisations that did not rely heavily on Government funding. Compared with the others who practice within social service contexts, this group seems to have fewer constraints imposed on their practice, which may provide a strong sense of autonomy and, therefore, agency and efficacy.

When looking at associations between theory-action congruency and the three frameworks, a number of observations can be made. Firstly, all practitioners drew from the dimensions of *Structural Connecting*. However, as seen above, theory-action congruency across the sample of twenty-two participants within this framework was mixed. Therefore, the factors for theory-action congruency do not show a strong relationship to the key dimensions of the *Structural Connecting* framework. Too much diversity existed to make strong associations, apart from those listed in the dot points above.

This stands in stark contrast to the theory-action congruency of the four practitioners drawing on the framework *Structural Shaping*, which was high for all. As discussed, these practitioners saw the big picture. They took a whole-system view and analysed power in multiple ways. They also had an action-research or experimental stance. With a learning-as-we-go mindset, they looked for possibilities to move incrementally forward towards their overall goals.

A similar result of theory-action congruency was found in relation to the framework *Structural Politicking*. Chapter Seven discussed the decision to set aside a group for whom political engagement *was not* a feature of practice. It was suggested that a relationship seems to exist between those with low theory-action congruency and a view that the apparatus of the state is located as a background factor for practice. Human resourcing issues (multiple roles),

organisational issues and geographic isolation were all associated with low theory-action congruency, and these factors could provide an explanation about practitioner reluctance or inability to politically engage with the state.

For the remaining participants who indicated that the state *was* in the foreground of their practice, political dimensions were drawn upon in practice. The majority of these practitioners had high theory-action congruency. These practitioners fell into two groups, according to their structural practice. The first group acted as advocates on behalf of disadvantaged groups, and the second group engaged in more direct methods of citizen development and citizen action.

When looking for an association between practitioners who draw on the dimensions of *Structural Shaping* (and have high theory-action congruency) *and* the location of practice, that is, local-level only work or work across levels, one sole practitioner stood out from the sample. Q7's work was described in the story told in Chapter Seven about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Solidarity group. Q7's practice reflects those attributes found in all three dimensions of *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. One could argue that the features of Q7's practice reflect *all* aspects of a theory of structural *community* development. Arguably, if the community is not involved in all aspects of practice, the work could not be considered community development. Q7's narrative was explicit about community members being integral to all processes.

What was also shown was that, with a structural analysis about disadvantage, Q7's practice necessarily moves beyond the local level to effect change at the sites where oppressive conditions originate. The ATSI Solidarity group makes structural links with people located in structures found on the vertical dimension, that is, they structure beyond the local level. Because community members are integral to all processes, this suggests Q7 has a feedback loop with community members about the issues affecting their daily lives. Opportunities for analysis about what could be effective practice may not be present where community members are not integral to the work.

Moreover, Q7's persistence over time is a factor for effectiveness. Practitioners with the highest theory-action congruency had a median length of 16.5 practice years, indicating that experiencing both successes and challenges over time may increase a sense of efficacy about

the possibilities of this approach for practice. This also suggests that training for less experienced practitioners and other forms of practice support is warranted. Additionally, Q7 explicitly focuses on a relatively narrow set of issues, those for Indigenous Australians. This suggests that achieving depth in practice is more effective than breadth if working within such frameworks. Breadth in practice involves allocating time and resources to a diversity of issues or population groups, and this may not provide the conditions needed for effective practice.

Although no actual ‘significance’ arguments can be made because of the qualitative nature of this study, it is hard to ignore the fact that only one practitioner out of twenty-two discussed practice in ways that associate with the entire range of themes distilled for structural community development practice. Other practitioners related to a majority of the themes, particularly those operating outside the social service system. However, being integral to the system, that is, being in receipt of state funding to enable practice, as was the case with Q7, seems to have assisted with the effectiveness of achieving specific practice goals. This suggests that state funding endows a type of legitimacy, so that the work with these community members has greater credence. Shaw (2007) argues that the social policy context can be a vehicle whereby people’s potential as active subjects in politics is enabled. People in ‘community’ are simultaneously constructed as objects of policy through community development, and sites where people’s real interests are engaged, and where policy could be changed (Shaw 2007). The emphasis taken in Q7’s work, to both include new participants through educative processes and create structural links with people who are more directly connected to the apparatus of the state, seems, in this case, to have been an effective way of working.

Further, the way this group sets up multiple pathways for outsiders into their processes, and the way they hold both task-oriented and relationship-building goals in tandem, shows this work has parallels with the type of processes seen in social movements. New social movements are a major means by which people define needs and make claims, exercising significant pressure on social policies and the state’s resources (Leonard 1999:156). As opposed to traditional social movements based on a specific class identity and workplace, the politics of identity – gender, culture, sexuality, age, disability, race – characterise new social movements (Leonard 1999:156). Further, social movements are often equated with a politics of protest or dissent (Ledwith 2011:199). Writing in the British context, Ledwith argues that

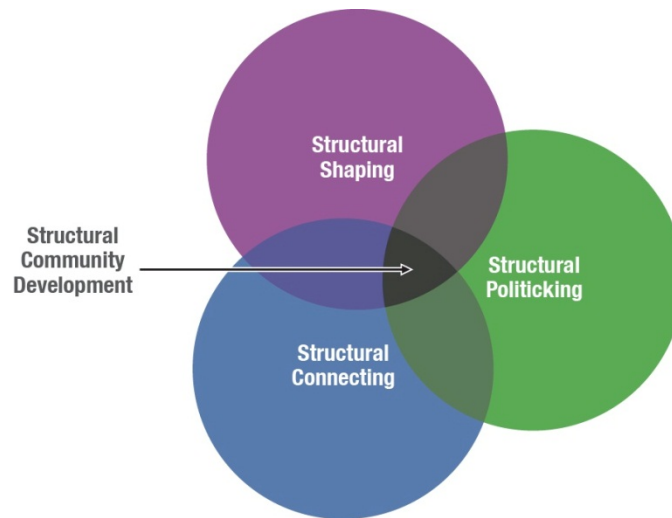
the politics of protest is not readily equated with British culture, but more often with Latin American communities, where “the courage to speak one’s truth is evident in public places” (2011:199). The politics of protest may be equally unfamiliar to the Australian context. However, in so far as structural community development seems to be activating spaces for deliberation and action, whilst also building social solidarity with a broad range of people, it can be seen as drawing from ideas found in new social movement theory. Practice was not discussed, to a great extent, as dissent or protest, although the idea that this type of practice is subversive was discussed. In essence, these types of solidarity-building processes are purposefully creating more and more ways to build relationships, that is, a base of solidarity with a broad range of people just like those needed for effective social movements.

To conclude this sub-section, it is posited that, held together, the three frameworks and the elements that create high theory-action congruency signpost a normative model of Structural Community Development. Practitioners who draw more heavily from particular elements of specific frameworks presented could benefit from integrating additional elements from other frameworks presented, as they may find these elements help them attain their practice goals. Further discussion about the practical implications for this theory is explored in the following section.

8.5 The Practical Implications of this Theory of Structural Community Development

This research project set out to develop a *useful theory* of Structural Community Development, one that has an emancipatory agenda, seeking to redress inequality for particular groups in society. It follows, therefore, that the measure of usefulness of a practice theory is that it should suggest practical ways to achieve such an emancipatory agenda. Practitioners in this study were found to draw from the framework *Structural Connecting* and, to varying degrees, elements of the other two frameworks, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. It is suggested that, by integrating these frameworks to a greater extent, practitioners can strengthen the structural nature of their community development work. Such integration can be represented diagrammatically. See (Figure 12) below.

Figure 12: The Three Frameworks Integrated



Four practical suggestions follow from an integration of the three frameworks.

Firstly, participants discussed that structural community development involves having a structural analysis about power and disadvantage. This informs the type of work in which practitioners become involved, and the relationships they build. Practitioners are in a unique and privileged position to hear stories of struggle, as well as people's hopes and dreams. Engagement in purposeful action as a response to those stories involves listening for the public dimension, or public issues, within those private stories. Having heard the public issues repeated by a number of individuals, practitioners have a mandate to pursue collective processes, to structure their dialogue with community members, and to initiate and maintain public action. A useful theory of structural community development is one that includes action to achieve a mandate for issues of a public nature, leading to collective action.

Secondly, participants discussed the concept of creating opportunities for community members to develop these same types of analyses. This idea was either held implicitly by practitioners, or discussed as a challenging aspect of the practice. Helping people develop critical thinking can be problematic, and could account for the paucity of stories in the data about these processes. Therefore, developing skills that create the conditions for community members' structural analysis seems critical. The backdrop to these processes relates to a key

factor, that structural community development is essentially about politics. It is political in the socio-cultural-political sense, that is, how an individual's lifeworld is shaped both by history and current contexts. It is also political in the empowerment sense, that is, an individual's lifeworld can be acted upon or shaped through collective action.

Participants also discussed the need for processes of structural community development to structure beyond the local level. This collective action connects the micro and macro levels of society. This is the realm where community development crosses over with political theory, as a vehicle for democratic renewal. Inequality and poverty persist because of ideological positions that have ascendancy at this time in our history. Processes that enable civic participation leading to greater citizenship, therefore, are integral to a practitioner's stance as a political actor. With an analysis that inequality serves to benefit the few, a useful theory of structural community development is one that places citizenship at its centre, and views practitioners as political actors.

Thirdly, structural community development involves creating structures as platforms for action. These are safe spaces where people can deliberate together, explore a variety of issues, engage in a variety of analyses and use their imagination to create a vision for the world-as-it-could-be. Drawing on systems-thinking, a variety of analyses means that these are multiple pathways into the structure, and multiple relationships are built. Often, these structures can be seen as spaces of resistance where, with a nuanced understanding of power and because of non-binary thinking, creative ways of acting emerge. These transcend the constraints of modernism or structuralism. Further, with an analysis that sustaining action over time is needed to effect change, a useful theory of structural community development is one that holds these elements of dialectical spaces together and seeks incremental social change over time.

Finally, practitioners involved in structural community development are engaged in praxis. Navigating the complexity of practice contexts, particularly within the current political ideology of neo-liberalism and managerialism, as well as remembering the practice's critical theoretical orientation, requires a stronger theoretical and reflective base from which to operate. Bridging the theory-practice divide, that is, theorising from empirical investigation *and* the systematic reflection by practitioners on theory that already exists, seems to be of critical importance for praxis.

To this end, it has been proposed that ongoing communities of practice are vehicles through which praxis is achieved. This study modeled, in a very small way, the type of process being called for, where practitioners came together to co-investigate a specific area of practice. In this study's case, the specific area investigated was 'structure', and to some degree practitioners co-constructed its diverse meanings and theorised its implications for practice. Practitioner feedback from Stage Two indicated that this type of collective process of reflection was helpful for both their individual understanding and knowledge-building, and also their ability to improve their practice. Therefore, a useful theory of structural community development is one that takes time to develop praxis.

In summary, four practical implications exist for a useful theory of structural community development including: action to achieve a mandate for issues of a public nature; viewing this practice as a form of political engagement; the importance of creating structures for deliberation and action; and the importance of processes for praxis. These stem from the multi-faceted theory discussed earlier in this chapter and the model comprising the dimensions from the three frameworks. That being the case, based on the contested terrain of community development, an argument can be made about a problem with positing a normative model. The next section discusses this problem.

8.5.1 A Caveat - The Problem with a Normative Model

In Chapter Three, the community development literature was examined by looking at various historical epochs of community development theory and practice. It was argued that a historical view was taken because important lessons could be learned from a critical reading of the past, with its parallels and continuities, but also because of recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008). What was seen through that historical overview was that community development has been, and continues to this day to be, a contested term and field. Indeed, the review demonstrated that the term 'community' and its associated practice has been and is still used in a myriad of ways, and is appropriated to justify a range of ideological positions. Its very "elasticity" (Shaw 2007) or "fuzziness" (Biddle 1966) can be problematic for practitioners in the field if they are not clear about several issues, including: the purpose of the practice; the ideology that informs various

practice approaches, particularly those associated with funded programs; and how best to use the myriad of techniques that are associated with this practice. Indeed, Shaw (2003:45), writing about the nexus of social policy, politics and community development practice, quotes Gary Craig, who argues,

Community work is too often drawn into the latest fashions of government policy agendas because that is where the funding is, rather than developing and maintaining a clear analysis to inform action. Increasingly, the emphasis on training seems to be on skills to the exclusion of thinking about theory and politics of community work (at both micro and macro levels). Practice is dominated by the policy and political context rather than creating it.

Because of these factors, this study has attempted to suggest *a* normative model theorising structure. However, it is acknowledged that this structural model sits alongside other models, some of which have been referred to in the literature review, for example, Ledwith's (2011) *Critical* approach, Gilchrist's (2009) *Networking* approach, and the *Developmental Method* found in Ingamells et al. (2011). It became clear throughout this study that there is *no single way* to engage in practice and it follows, therefore, that there is *no single way* to theorise practice. What this research project has achieved, however, is to make explicit *a theory about structure*, one with an explicit agenda to construct knowledge 'from below', whilst holding on to an emancipatory approach to practice. Therefore, this caveat about positing a normative model seeks to emphasise that practitioners need to reflect on various models and approaches to practice and bring elements of such theorising into their own personal framework for practice (Westoby & Ingamells 2011). These two processes, firstly, reflection on theory and secondly, making theory explicit through personal practice frameworks, should be helpful. They would assist practitioners to develop a cogent analysis about the complexity involved in their work, enabling them to respond more creatively and constructively in their community development efforts.

The theory posited in this chapter has implications for further research and education. This is discussed in the following section.

8.6 The Implications for Further Research and Education

This section discusses implications for a theory of structural community development in relation to further research and how some of the theory's concepts could be integrated into community development education.

8.6.1 Theory-testing is Needed

The exploratory nature of this study supports this theory-building process. However, to make this theory truly useful, processes to verify the extent of its relevance should be employed next. This particularly relates to the ideas discussed about theory-action congruency and those distilled as a model for practice.

In his “manifesto for social research”, Blaikie (2010:10) argues that a deductive research strategy is one that tests theories by testing hypotheses derived from them. A deductive research strategy can use both quantitative and qualitative methods and, with the latter, hypotheses testing can be seen in terms of a discursive argument from evidence (Blaikie 2010). A discursive argument is used here in the sense that thinking is directed at trying to understand the deeper causes or meanings of social phenomena (Ransome 2010:434). Therefore, having a base of theory from which to start deeper analysis of phenomena is essential, and this research project has enabled such processes of theory testing to occur.

The theory posited in this chapter is an interpretation of data based on the voices of twenty-two experienced practitioners. It was argued earlier that these interpretations might not have universal recognition. However, exploring the theory with a wider cohort of practitioners across a wider range of practice contexts would more comprehensively reveal the value of the theory for the field. This is particularly pertinent to the discussion on theory-action congruency. The five factors proposed as explanations for discrepancies between practitioners' espoused theories and theories-in-use could benefit from more thorough investigation. This process would be particularly useful as it relates to practice-specific contexts, where similar work is undertaken. The diversity of practice contexts found across the twenty-two practitioners in this study generated the five explanations for incongruency/congruency. However, more targeted investigation could reveal other

explanations and analyses. These kinds of practice-specific investigations could also benefit policy-making processes, as evidence about effective practice may be helpful when policy makers consider how they distribute resources, and establish program directions for community development.

8.6.2 Implications for Community Development Education

Community development is a practical activity, requiring of its practitioners a range of analyses and skills. Three implications for structural community development education result from this research project, which include: the centrality of politics in education; key skills required for citizenship development; and practitioner access to community development education.

Firstly, the proposed model argues that community development practitioners understand the political nature of the practice to a greater degree. In Chapter Seven (Section 7.5.3), it was suggested that community members have become depoliticised because of neo-liberal drivers, and a trend seen with new types of governance arrangements. The example used discussed the loss of support for small community organisations in favour of larger organisations, and the link community development has with state governments rather than local governments to support local initiatives. It was argued that people in local communities have become dislocated from relationships, organisations and democratic processes that can carry their voice. It would follow that such depoliticisation has also occurred with practitioners. Practitioners, too, are members of local communities and, if they are employed in this work, they are part of these new processes of governance. Community development education framed around depoliticisation processes and, practitioners as political actors should be incorporated into educational opportunities for practitioners. A greater emphasis on the practice as it relates to critical theory and political theory also seems warranted.

Secondly, there was an emphasis in the model on activating citizenship and civic development. Skills for citizenship development enable collective processes, particularly micro skills, to develop purposeful relationships and group work skills that form the basis for work linking the personal with structural concerns. Another skill set relates to the act of structuring processes, that is, how groups develop; formalise (or not); partner with others (or

not); and institutionalise effective processes so they become routine. In essence, it involves how they decide what shape and form their community development structures will take to hold processes over time. These very practical skills, which seem critical to civic development, might involve the use of dialogue with community members. Two practical examples include Ledwith's (2011:68-73) approaches to storytelling and constructing counter-narratives; and Westoby and Dowling's dialogical approach (2009:202-207), which seeks to build solidarity through the "deconstructive conversation". These types of approaches, or others like them, should have a greater emphasis in community development education so practitioners have opportunities to develop these skills.

The final point regarding community development education relates to issues of access to education. Lack of community development training was identified as one of the possible explanations for low theory-action congruency amongst the sample for this study. Boulet (2010) argues that, in Australia, community development has minimal representation in social work and other curricula, particularly in relation to societal-structural impediments to realise the practices' ideals. Further, it pales into insignificance compared with the research and theorising that explores other practice approaches. My personal experience as a research student at the University of Queensland attests to the limited investigation of the field. Out of the 70+ research-by-higher-degree students in the social work and human services program, I am one of few exploring development practice, attesting to its under-theorised status. However, this subject matter, in various forms, is taught at this institution across a number of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. These circumstances all reinforce the need for practitioners to develop their own communities of practice so collective theorising can take place despite any lack of educational opportunities they may have had. From where I stand as a recent practitioner and beginning researcher, I believe academic institutions in general could be more supportive of practitioners, not just in terms of systematic practice research, but also in terms of a range of educational opportunities, beyond those associated with undergraduate and post-graduate degree programs.

8.7 Conclusion

This research set out to solve an "intellectual puzzle" (Mason 2002:13), that is, a set of circumstances that I, as a practitioner, viewed as problematic for community development.

My training in community development taught me that it is a practice through which people can experience liberation from oppression, in particular, experiences of oppression derived from various structures and systems in society as they impact on the lives of individuals, groups and whole communities (Mullaly 2007). Further, because community development is a social practice, it is inextricably linked to the 'how to', that is, practical ways in which community development can work towards the amelioration of structural oppression. However, there exists a vast array of social contexts in which the practice operates and the literature review outlined a myriad of theoretical positions informing the practice.

The study's aim was to explore how community development is reducing structural disadvantage and to develop theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. In the process of dialogue between participants and myself, during which theory informed my questions and prompts, we were able to tease out some of the problems associated with structural practice and also co-construct a model for practice. Structural Community Development is a multi-faceted theory and features three frameworks: *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. The study provides four practical suggestions to assist community development practitioners to better align their aspirations for practice with actual outcomes of practice. They include: the importance of having a structural analysis about power and disadvantage; opportunities for community members to engage politically; the creation of structures to enable deliberation and action; and the systematic reflection on theory and practice as praxis.

This study developed an effective theory of structural community development, one that contributes to the literature as well as providing practical direction in-situ, that is, in the places where practice occurs.

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Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet



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Participant Information Sheet

Project Title:

**An investigation into the relationship between structure
and community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development**

Researcher: Ms. Athena Lathouras (known as Tina)

Contact Details:

Ms. Athena Lathouras
PhD Candidate
School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences
University of Queensland
Phone: 0413 738 623
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Research Advisors:

Professor Jill Wilson
Principle Advisor
Phone: 07 3365 1254
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Dr Peter Westoby
Associate Advisor
Phone: 07 3365 3028
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What is the purpose of the study?

I am seeking the assistance of community development practitioners to participate in a research project about practice.

The aim of this project is to develop a useful theory for contemporary community development practice. Currently, community development is a complex and contested practice due to the various and fragmented theoretical underpinnings and the broad-ranging policy contexts and practice approaches in community development practice.

This research project will investigate one particular aspect of community development practice – structural aspects of community development practice. Current literature references structural aspects of community development, however, these ideas are not readily translated into practical approaches or methods for practice.

Who is being interviewed?

The research will take place in two Australian states – **Queensland and Victoria**.

Participants will be selected against a range of specific criteria. They will:

- be **currently working in the field** (therefore not people who are solely academics or commentators on the field; though it is noted that some academics may also be practitioners); **and**
- have had **three or more years experience** as community development practitioners;
- either be working in an urban context; **or**
- working in a regional or rural context;
- either be employed by a Non-Government agency; **or**
- employed by a Government agency; and
- be working in a range of fields or contexts eg neighbourhood / local work; regional / peak work; **or** specialised areas, such as micro-finance or working with people from CALD backgrounds etc.

How will information be collected?

Information will be collected through three main methods:

- an individual in-depth interview;
- an opportunity to reflect on a small ‘findings’ paper generated from a synthesis of content from the interviews; and
- an opportunity to participate in a group meeting process.

Please note however, it is envisaged that not all practitioners who participate in an in-depth interview will want to respond to the findings paper, or will want to participate in the group meeting process. All aspects of participation at any of the stages are completely voluntary.

The in-depth interviews will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes and the group meeting, with membership comprised of the previously interviewed practitioners, will take approximately 90 minutes – two hours. The in-depth interviews will be audio-recorded with the participant’s permission. Interviews will be conducted in a place that is convenient for the participants. The two group meetings, one held in Queensland and one held in Victoria, are where a group of practitioners will gather together to discuss pertinent issues, at a location central to the

majority of participants who wish to take part. These groups will be facilitated by me, and with the aid of an observer/note-taker, the summarised content of key discussions will be recorded on butcher's paper. The observer will not be associated with the community development field. The person chosen as observer will be made known to the group participants at the commencement of the planning for the group processes. At which time your approval will be sought for the inclusion of the person as an observer in the group. The group meeting processes will also be audio-recorded, with participant's permission, to ensure all aspects of the discussions are accurately captured.

What will participants be asked to do?

Participants will mainly be asked to reflect on various aspects of your work. Because this will elicit an array of practice approaches, and to narrow down the breadth of information, the types of questions asked will place emphasis on various aspects of 'structure'. For example: the structures you work with, and perhaps at times, resist or work against; the type of structures you help create and sustain and the associated outcomes this has for people you work with. You will also be asked to reflect on your practice approaches in relation to the particular field of community development you are working in; and the opportunities, issues and challenges you are currently facing in your development work.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, or would like more information please contact me, Tina Lathouras, on Mobile: 0413 738 623 or Email: t.lathouras@uq.edu.au.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is voluntary and anyone who agrees to participate may refuse, at any time, to: answer any questions, attend interviews or groups, or receive the findings paper. They may also withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. This will not affect your relationship with the University of Queensland.

What are the benefits of the study to you?

The main benefit to participants will be the opportunity to reflect on your practice approaches and if you get involved in the group process, to engage in a collective knowledge building exercise with your colleagues, which will generate ideas about a structural dimensions of practice.

A more indirect benefit of your participation in this study will be to the cohort of current and future community development practitioners, as the results of the study may be presented at conferences, forums and in publications.

Will my privacy be respected?

All information provided by participants will be kept strictly confidential and no names or any other identifying information about participants, or others who they engage in practice with practitioners, will be included in any report on the study.

Likewise, establishing the group processes will also include establishing agreements for participant confidentiality.

All data (transcripts and consent forms) will be stored in a locked area to which only I, the researcher has access. Transcripts will be kept in a de-identified format. All audio recordings, transcripts and other written data from interviews and group processes will be destroyed at the project's conclusion.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The overall research findings, from the various data collection processes and analysis processes throughout the project, will be integrated into my final analysis in the form of the written doctoral thesis. The theoretical approach and the associated practice approaches or methods developed from this study may be presented at conferences, forums and in publications in the future. No personally identifying information will be used. Only pseudonyms will be used in the analysis, presentations and written documents from this study.

The Researcher

Ms. Tina Lathouras, doctoral candidate at the University of Queensland, will be conducting the research. I have previously worked as a community development worker.

Ethical Review

This study has been reviewed by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council Guidelines. You are free to discuss your participation in this research with Tina Lathouras or her supervisor, Professor Jill Wilson on telephone number (07) 3365 1254. If you have any concerns about the manner in which this study is being conducted, you can contact the ethics officer of the University not involved in the study, on telephone number (07) 3365 3924.

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please contact me on, telephone number 0413 738 623 or email: t.lathouras@uq.edu.au.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Tina Lathouras
PhD Student
School of Social Work and Human Services
University of Queensland

Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form



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INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**An investigation into the relationship between structure
and community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development**

Researcher: Athena Lathouras
PhD Student
University of Queensland
St Lucia 4068

- I have been given clear information, both written and verbal, about the study and I understand what is required of me.
- I understand that I am participating as a “qualified individual” and not as “authorized representative” of my employer organisation.
- I understand that participation is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any question and I remain free to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation.
- I understand that if I choose not to participate in this study, or choose to withdraw from the study at any time, it will not affect my relationship with the University of Queensland or my studies (present or future) in any way.
- I understand and consent to being contacted by the Researcher to advise me of the time, date and venue of the interview.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes without identifying participants. All information provided during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential.
- I understand that these audio recordings will be kept in a secure filing system until they are destroyed, at the end of the research project. Further, that my name or any identifying information will not be used in reports or published papers.

- I understand that an interview will be conducted in a place convenient for the participants.
- I understand that all data collected in the interview will be de-identified and reported as group data and not individual data.
- I understand that the findings of the study will be presented at conferences and published in academic journals.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in the study and that it has no immediate impact on my work.
- I am aware that I may ask any further questions about the research study at any time.

I have read the information sheet and I hereby consent to take part in an interview as part of this research project.

Name of participant
(Print Name)

Signed Date.....

Name of Witness.....
(Print Name)

SignedDate.....

Participant Contact Details:

Email address.....

Telephone & or Mobile Number

Appendix 3, Stage 1 Interview Guide

Contexts of Practice

Q: What are the main contexts in which you work? People you work with? Your role?

Q: What would you say is the main purpose of your work? What are you trying to achieve?

Q: If I was to say words such as ‘structure’, ‘structuring’, ‘structural’, ‘structured’ what comes to mind about your CD practice? Example?

Q: Do you view your thinking about structural aspects of practice as somewhat *aspirational*, meaning you hope for it, but you know that is not very achievable in the day-to-day realities of your work?

Q: Is there a tension between what you’d like to do, compared with what you can do? Has your thinking about this changed over time? Why?

Structural Disadvantage

Q: What role do you see CD having in relation to disadvantaged people?

Q: How do see CD addressing issues of disadvantage? Is this something CD should be doing do you think?

Structure and Agency

Q: In your reflections have you experienced or seen processes of CD that enable people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation? In what ways?

Q: What have been the main barriers to stopping such transformational work?

Q: What kinds of critical inputs have been necessary for people to engage in such transformational work?

(For people in social policy / government roles particularly):

Q: Have you been involved in processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of a CD process you’ve been involved in?

Sub-altern Counter Structures

CD is a context where people from minority groups can have a space, and find a voice. Perhaps leading to greater citizenship within our democratic system. Q: What reflections do you have about this / examples?

Q: Are you hopeful that these spaces might one day be able to influence more mainstream structures / systems? Have you experienced this?

Structuring Work Within and Between Levels or Domains

There are so many different ways that development workers utilise structures, or structure the work (groups, organisations, regional bodies etc) to assist with the ongoing management of processes or to help sustain that work. Q: How have you structured some of the work you do – particularly ways that you consider have been particularly helpful, or particularly innovative to achieving the aims of that work?

Q: Could you share that story and tell me about the structures / structuring that took place.

Q: What are the key tensions, challenges, barriers in creating/maintaining such structures?

Sometimes CD work crosses different kinds of boundaries – eg across sectors, across levels (local, regional etc), across non-government and government.

Q: Have you been involved in any work like this?

Q: What were the circumstances that led you to work across these different sectors or levels?

Methodologies for Practice

Q: When you think about practice principles or approaches you utilise to achieve the outcomes you get from your CD work, what comes to mind?

Issues, Challenges, Opportunities

Q: When you think about your current work, what barriers or difficulties do you find most challenging?

Q: What excites you most about the opportunities that exist for the people you do your community development work with, or for the field of CD?

Other

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share that you think might be helpful information for this study?

Q: What led you to want to participate in this study?

Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews

Researcher: Have you experienced processes of CD that have enabled people to overcome disadvantages or marginalisation? Do you have a story?

V3: I'll go with a current story. I work with a group of Somalian women. They're always setting up homework programs for their kids, sewing classes and lunches. They're really good at that kind of thing; expressing what their needs are and getting it. And there was one woman in particular who turned up regularly at work and she was great at really articulating what her community needed, I guess she would have been seen as a community leader. We worked together on small funding submissions to local government, say, to get \$1,000 for something for her community – a homework program. Together, we worked on these things and got things happening; and to see her say to her community, 'we've got this, we've done this', but she'd done it, you know, I'd supported her, and helped her along a bit, but she'd done it and got that done for her community. So this organisation, the community centre was in a housing commission area, and it became their place as well, so they could come along and do their sewing and have their meetings, outings, homework groups. Frankly, this blew me away. I was so naïve, about what their kids face; because for my kids, life's a breeze. But to see this community and this woman in particular, have pride and ownership, to see how she'd helped her community to get these things that were important to them, from just socialising over sewing or making lunches, it was great. Then we drew them into things that we did naturally – like they'd cook food for our AGM; they'd do incredible dancing at end-of-year events. By doing this you're helping them do what they want to do in their communities then obviously they are going to want to join in with what you're doing.

Researcher: So there's a reciprocity that exists?

V3: Yep, because of the respect. Culturally we accept what they want; 'this is what we do in our culture'. I think there's a great massive chasm between what we think people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need and want, and what they really want and need; because their needs are so complex.



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Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups)

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Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

GROUP MEETING CONSENT FORM

An investigation into the relationship between structure and community development practice: Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development

Researcher: Athena Lathouras
PhD Student
University of Queensland
St Lucia 4068

- I have been given clear information, both written and verbal, about the study and I understand what is required of me.
- I understand that I am participating as a “qualified individual” and not as “authorized representative” of my employer organisation.
- I understand that participation is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any question and I remain free to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation.
- I understand that if I choose not to participate in this study, or choose to withdraw from the study at any time, it will not affect my relationship with the University of Queensland or my studies (present or future) in any way.
- I understand and consent to being contacted by the Researcher to advise me of the time, date and venue of the group meeting.
- I understand that the group meetings will be audio recorded for research purposes without identifying participants.
- I understand that these audio recordings will be kept in a secure filing system until they are destroyed, at the end of the research project. Further, that my name or any identifying information will not be used in reports or published papers.

- I understand that a group meeting will be conducted in a place convenient for the majority of participants.
- I understand that all data collected in the group meeting will be de-identified and reported as group data and not individual data.
- I understand that the findings of the study will be presented at conferences and published in academic journals.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in the study and that it has no immediate impact on my work.
- I am aware that I may ask any further questions about the research study at any time.

I have read the information sheet and I hereby consent to take part in a group meeting as part of this research project.

Name of participant
(*Print Name*)

Signed Date.....

Witness.....Date.....

Participant Contact Details:

Email address.....

Telephone & or Mobile Number

Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map



Appendix 7, Findings Paper

Appendix 7, Findings Paper

Findings from

Stage One of the doctoral study:

*An investigation into the relationship between structure and
community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development*

For the participants interviewed for the study.

Written by:

Athena (Tina) Lathouras

B.Soc.Wk [Hons]; Grad Cert Soc. Wk [Com Dev];

Doctoral Candidate

Student No: 33372899

Principle Advisor: Professor Jill Wilson

Associate Advisor: Dr Peter Westoby

9th November 2009

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Study	1
PART 1 - CONTEXTS FOR PRACTICE, ROLES AND THE PURPOSE OF CD WORK....	3
PART 2 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	4
2.1 The Idea of ‘Structure’	4
2.1.1 Structures as systems in society	5
2.1.2 Community-created structures	5
2.1.3 Structuring CD work	5
2.1.4 Structure as a space for experimenting, holding tensions	6
2.2. Structural Disadvantage	6
2.2.1 At the Heart of the Work.....	6
2.2.2. CD is everybody – so we’ll all be advantaged.....	7
3. Structure and Agency	8
4. Critical Processes that have enabled Transformation	9
5. The Transformation of Powerful Structures.....	10
5.1 Yet to see powerful structures transformed.....	10
5.2 Local Government transformed	10
5.3 Social Movements and Systemic Policy Advocacy	11
5.4 The idea of Revolution.....	12
6. Subaltern Counter Structures	12
7. Structuring Work between Levels or Domains	13
7.1 The importance of seeking change at more than one level	13
7.2 Broad range of approaches	14
PART 3 – RESEARCH QUESTION.....	14
8. Challenges with structuring.....	14
9. Barriers to Transformation and Other Challenges for Practice.....	16
9.1 Societal hegemony and colonisation.....	16
9.2 Government social policy and the impact on the sector.....	16
9.3 CD practitioner skills and practice	18
9.4 The personal costs associated with practitioner activism.....	18
10. Opportunities	19
10.1 A new epoch.....	19
10.2 What makes change happen	19
Conclusion.....	20
Bibliography.....	22

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an account of findings from the first stage of the doctoral study “*An investigation into the relationship between structure and community development practice: Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development*”. The paper is a collective document representing a glimpse into the voices and stories of the 22 community development (CD) practitioners interviewed for the study. Their descriptions and explanations about the topic have been clustered under various headings. These headings, and the themes and concepts under them represent the lens through which I have reflected on the subject matter as the researcher. They by no means represent all the wonderful stories of community development told to me during the interviews.

Words and phrases in double quotations marks indicate direct quotes from interviewees. At times an individual’s quote has been included to illustrate a range of opinions about a particular subject matter. That quote will be followed by a code indicating which participant made the comment. These de-identified codes are outlined in a legend, describing the various CD contexts for each participant in this study. The legend can be found following the paper’s conclusion.

The purpose of sharing this paper is to invite participants to continue in the research process by responding to this paper.

The Study

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to build a theory of structural community development. I propose that effective community development has several structural dimensions, of which structural change is one. New theorising is required, one that can hold the radical agenda and analysis of structural oppression, as well as integrating post modern and post-structural ideas around diverse identities and culture; and integrating a careful understanding of agency.

Because community development is a complex and contested practice its investigation calls for the use of a qualitative methodology to find answers to the research questions posed. The knowledge base, of a structural approach to community development, is drawn from practitioners who are the key informants for this study.

Research Questions

Stage 1

Q1: How do practitioners think about structure within their work?

Q2: How do practitioners put this understanding into practice?

Q3: What opportunities, issues and challenges do practitioners face when they put this into practice?

Stage 2

Q: What are the relationships between the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

Methodology

The first stage involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 community development practitioners in Queensland and Victoria, to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of 'structure'. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. A synthesis of the overarching themes from the interviews is provided to the interviewees in the form of this findings paper.

A second stage of data collection is planned and this paper is the main resource for that process. Participants who wish to continue in the research process can respond to this paper. Questions for reflection have been provided to assist readers to think about particular issues and how they might respond.

Participants can respond to this paper in two ways:

1. Make comments using the response sheet provided; or 2. Attend a group meeting with other interviewees, where together we will examine and test some of the thoughts proposed in this paper and collectively analyse the information to assist me in the process of answering the study's overall research questions.

There will be two groups comprised of the previously interviewed practitioners held in Melbourne and Brisbane. Teleconferencing facilities will be available at the Brisbane meeting providing access for regional and rural participants to participate in this part of the study.

At the conclusion of both group processes, further analysis of the findings from both stages will be undertaken and integrated into my final analysis in the form of the thesis.

Responding to the Paper – some questions to think about as you read

The paper covers a broad range of subject matter and therefore it may be helpful to read it with a few questions in mind.

Have I accurately interpreted specific points you made?

Does this paper reflect the major points you were making?

Are there any major components missing of what could be thought of as structural CD?

When themes have been discussed with opposing or diverse viewpoints, how do you think these points talk to each other or intersect?

How do you make sense of the contradictions?

Other questions relating to particular sections are located in the body of the paper (in text boxes).

PART 1 - CONTEXTS FOR PRACTICE, ROLES AND THE PURPOSE OF CD WORK

Participants in this study are experienced CD practitioners. A pre-requisite to participate in this research was a minimum of three years CD practice. The majority has had significant lengths of experience with some practicing for forty years. The total number of community development practice experience is 347 years.

Contexts for practice

The majority of participants undertake various forms of paid CD work. These can be defined in three ways.

1. They work with various ‘communities of interest’, such as: Sudanese Australians from refugee backgrounds; migrants; aging community members and seniors groups; young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
2. Work in ‘issue-specific’ contexts, such as, community housing or working with people at risk of ill health.
3. Others work in the context of ‘place’ and work across a geographical community. This may include: a local community (suburbs or towns) or a number of local communities across a region; work from a local government authority base, or an organisation such as a peak body or University; or, across a regional network of other CD practitioners or neighbourhood houses. It was noted that CD work in these geographical contexts usually evolves into particular focus areas of interest for people living in those communities.

Some participants take their community building efforts into unpaid contexts as well. For them, CD work is seen as a vocation. As one participant put it, “in our culture we don’t have the word ‘volunteer’ in our dictionary....we help one another naturally, culturally, religiously....it is not your choice; it is a must” (V8).

Diverse roles

When asked about the role practitioners enact, the majority of responses included descriptors such as, “facilitator”, “connector”, “animator”, “mobiliser” and “networker”. There was also acknowledgment that these roles involve being a “learner” (Q6); “leading and being led” (Q2); a “researcher” (V8); and “being opportunistic....helping a group to be ready to jump into action when an opportunity arises” (V11). Moreover, the roles often include being a “responder” (Q2) to community needs as they arise, and also about “creating spaces where people can meet and incubate good ideas to be turned into action” (V1).

The purpose of CD work

The question about the main purpose of the work fell into four areas. Some participant’s focused on one or two main areas, others commented about a range of purposes to the work.

1. Several participants argued that the aim of the work is to create social change (Q2; Q7; Q8; V1) and bring about “global and social justice” (Q10); that “challenges or provides alternatives to dominant structures or processes which cause oppression” (V10).
2. Many discussed the notion that CD creates “opportunities for increased citizenship” (Q9; V8; V12), when people “have a voice” (Q8; V8) and “barriers to participation”, “employment, education, affordable housing” (Q7; Q3), are reduced.

3. For some practitioners emphasis was placed on strengthening communities (Q1; Q4; Q6; V4; V11;), to “increase the overall well-being of communities” (V5), to “prevent ill health”(V9); to be “stronger, more cohesive, resilient, viable, and capable” (V2; V3; V7). This involves “building positive relationships and connections” and “creating partnerships (Q10; V10)”. So that community members “will have the mental space to be creative people” (V12); and as a community, will have the ability to “appreciate a sense of itself....to see itself and whatever it needs to face up to” (Q2)....perhaps having the realization that, “hey, we’re it” (V1) and engage in some sort of action together.

4. And finally, going beyond just the desired outcomes from the work, participants also discussed purpose in terms of more process-oriented aspects, where CD is seen as an alternative to more traditional or dominant ways of working, like those that have ascendancy in the social services sector. Participants commented that the work aims to “equalize power relationships... often challenging the status quo” (V10). It also “provides different ways of doing democracy” (V1), where all “people’s contributions are validated” (V10) and therefore are integral to processes. Drawing on postmodern ideas were comments such as, “there are multiple ways of doing ‘community’....and “there’s more than one ‘truth’....in our thinking, behaving and relating....[in order] to change society” (V1).

The way participants discussed their work could be viewed as having both activist and community building intentions. By placing different emphasis on these aims means how problems or opportunities within communities are viewed, as well as approaches taken, differ. For instance, several people discussed that their aim was to “become redundant” (V2; V6) “render myself useless”(V11); in a sense, to create sustainable communities, those that have strength, resilience and the capacity to act, bringing about the kind of changes people wish to see in their communities. Others are always looking for the “social impacts” (Q8) and “policy implications” (V5) for communities.

How the aims of the work are achieved were discussed at length in the interviews and is the craft of the work. However, given the broad range of contexts and objectives for CD work, it is suffice to say that this work is multifaceted and complex. As one practitioner put it, “it’s like a dance...you go back and you go forward, you go sideways...the work has to be matched by the capacity of the community...and you have to be alert to the signs... but there’s no tick boxes to gauge how people are moving forward” (V11).

PART 2 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: How do practitioners think about structure within their work?

Q2: How do practitioners put this understanding into practice?

2.1 The Idea of ‘Structure’

The idea of ‘structure’ is discussed in the literature on community development, often though in simplistic ways, or is mystified. It is proposed that a more sophisticated and concrete outlook on structure is needed, one that can work with the complexities that exist in our contemporary and globalised society. Therefore, participants were encouraged to discuss their ideas about ‘structure’ in an exploratory way and four key points of view were expressed.

2.1.1 Structures as systems in society

Firstly, a large proportion of participants discussed structure as bureaucratic systems in society. Emphasis was placed on having an analysis of the power and resources various systems hold and how these may be used to benefit community members. However, many participants also acknowledged that bureaucratic processes and systems are often a source of oppression and reinforce disadvantage; they are, as one participant stated, “fundamentally flawed” (Q1). Bureaucracies are complex entities that often use “exclusive language” (V6), and are frequently inflexible in their rules and the manner in which organisational policies are implemented. Some practitioners attempt to assist community members to “navigate [these] systems” (Q1). Others also work to change those systems through various policy-advocacy or planning processes; or as one participant described, by finding “loop holes” (V12) in systems between stated or declared policies and “invisible” (V12) policies “that are there by innuendo or inference, which is where we CD workers have some flexibility” (V12) in effecting beneficial change.

2.1.2 Community-created structures

Secondly, some participants discussed the role of community-created and community-owned ‘structures’. Many participants discussed the importance of creating new structures, “that can drive the agendas of people who have been excluded by existing structures” (Q3). One participant said it this way, “community is essentially about ‘spirit’, which is about passion and responsibility....we need structures that will act as vehicles to nurture that spirit and responsibility” (Q10). Furthermore, others emphasised the importance of starting out in an unstructured way; “start the good idea, get things happening without going through all the formalities” (V1); “don’t move too quickly to structure something....I see the impact on how [dealing with governance matters] detracts people’s attention from what they want to achieve”... “they [the structures] become ends in themselves, not just vehicles to get things done” (Q4).

2.1.3 Structuring CD work

The third way participants discussed the idea of structure was as a verb, ‘structuring’ CD work. These can be clustered around three main points.

1. Some participants referred to structuring as various methods or approaches they undertake (Q2; Q10; Q5; V9). “Flexibility” was a key word used by the majority of participants. Structuring CD processes requires a level of flexibility to ensure outcomes are achieved, yet at the same time remain agile enough to take opportunities as they arise. As one participant put it, processes need to be “like a house where the roof is self-supporting, where you can move the walls around as the need arises, as suits the situation” (V11).

Remaining flexible is counter-balanced with another theme - the idea of structuring is to ensure “accountability” (Q6; V7); to have the ability to track progress as a piece of work unfolds (Q2); or to ensure there is practitioner “self-discipline” (V11), so that planned activities and goals are actually achieved.

2. Others talked about structuring for inclusive processes. They discussed the implications of working with groups and the inherent diversity that exists in points of view, needs and desired outcomes. Inclusive processes, “where people can come along...and are “empowered to use their creativity and ingenuity” (Q2) were seen as important aspects of structuring CD work.

3. Another view is that structuring has implications to ensure the sustainability of processes over the long term. Processes and structures are put in place and may involve “complex structuring arrangements, so the right people can be involved and have the right level of control” (Q9) essential to achieve desired outcomes.

2.1.4 Structure as a space for experimenting, holding tensions

The final way structure was discussed was about “holding the tension” between “old structures, existing ways of being...and new ones” (V1); where “new synergies are created... [and] new ways of partnering” (Q3) take place. Yet, aims such as these are not always achievable. There was an acknowledgement that this work is “an experiment”, “an exquisite balance between structure and flow – so you get really creative; you don’t get mindless; spontaneous... yet purposeful” (Q2).

Practitioners in this study are alert to the reality that there are dominant ways of thinking and working, for example, where ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ may be inevitable. However, as one practitioner contends, “every structure is a place of contest” (Q10). In CD work “we try to develop structures that create the space to maximize people’s power over their own decision-making processes, and we may try to co-operate with other groups developing their own structures...yet oppression and exploitation can occur *in every structure* and CD needs to resist processes that may “overpower people and minimize autonomy, responsibility, creativity.... community” (Q10).

2.2. Structural Disadvantage

A range of critiques from radical, socialist or structural perspectives have traditionally advocated far-reaching and fundamental changes in political, social and economic systems (Popple 1995:34). The radical critique has an analysis of the structural basis of poverty which is perpetuated by economic, political, and social structures, creating an unequal distribution of resources and power throughout society (Popple & Quinney 2002). It is not uncommon to find reference to community development practice being a vehicle to redress structural disadvantage in the literature. The questions in the interviews about structural disadvantage elicited strong and at times, contradictory responses from participants.

2.2.1 At the Heart of the Work

For many practitioners, the role CD has in relation to disadvantage is that it is its “primary focus”, “integral to it”, “fundamental” and “at the heart of the work” (Q5; Q8; V2; V5; V6; V10). For participants working with Indigenous communities in particular, comments were made such as, “in some ways CD becomes almost their *only* option...it is their shield against powerful oppressors that continue to colonise, control and manage people’s lives” (Q4). Moreover, another perspective was that CD “can’t help *but* do it [address disadvantage]...because CD is about people working together to build a better life for themselves, and their family and neighbours, and if those people are disadvantaged, then by definition a ‘better life’ is *not disadvantaged*” (Q9). Other participants referred to the current number of ‘crises’ facing communities due to “climate change, peak oil and the global economic crisis” (V10). They fear that there will be “new losers” (V10), because of the “shifting face of poverty” (Q2) and therefore CD will be working with a “vastly expanded group” (V10) who will become disadvantaged as a result.

Another concern raised here were issues around the way CD is tied to funded programs, that often come with pre-determined outcomes set by Government policy. For people who hold a strong ethos about CD addressing poverty, their concern was that “CD forgets its purpose” (Q2). “A lot of CD these days is ‘event managing’...‘requiring a discipline to keep returning to *why* you are engaging” (Q2).

2.2.2. CD is everybody – so we’ll all be advantaged

The same range of questions about disadvantage elicited a very different view from other participants that can be summed up as, “yet, CD is for everyone” (V1; V10). As one participant put it, “I think there’s a bit of a clichéd view about how CD works only with marginalized people” (V3). This ambivalence stems from the notion that CD work takes place “*across* a community” (Q2), “with well-resourced people too” (Q5). Several participants critiqued the definition of the word “disadvantage”, with one saying, “what is ‘disadvantage’ anyway....no access to love, good relationships...there is spiritual and social poverty also” (V1).

An analysis that includes a more holistic view of poverty and disadvantage occupied many participants’ thoughts. As one participant said, “I really believe that poverty is a product of the break down of relationships between people...it’s not just a matter of economics, it’s about how we *do* economics” (Q10). Another participant voiced a similar perspective arguing, “in our neighbourhood’s we’ve fragmented our contacts with each other”.... “I think we need to rebuild those” (Q7). Community development “connects people back together again”... “it doesn’t eliminate disadvantage, but it creates a context in which people now have a sense of responsibility for one another”... “they cannot abandon their responsibility to their poor brothers and sisters” (Q10). Further, putting the emphasis on the word ‘community’ in ‘community development’, as one participant stated, means that through “sharing space and time [a] gift exchange or reciprocity” (V1) will take place and “from that, sacrificing of self-interest for common interest” (V1). These arguments allude to the restoration of ‘community’ or kinship, conditions where all community members will be ‘advantaged’.

It should be noted that a number of participants raised both these differing viewpoints as integral to their ideas about structural disadvantage. They may have responded firstly that addressing structural disadvantage was central to CD, but later discussed the notion that CD is for all.

These arguments require further analysis. The later point of view, that CD is for everyone, sits within contemporary notions of social capital¹, which talks about the collective value of social networks. Yet, a critique of social capital comes from the perspective that while everyone is busy volunteering, building connections and networks, the source of oppression that subjugates individuals and groups in society will not be addressed. Processes that continue to exclude and decrease citizenship may be masked when too great an emphasis is placed on building social capital.

¹ R. Putnam, 2000

Question for reflection:

There is a strong tradition of CD that advocates our priority should always be with ‘the poorest of the poor’, however, there is a critique that by locating community development workers into low socio-economic communities (as they often are) and not working more systemically, or across communities, is ineffectual.

What are your thoughts on this?

3. Structure and Agency

Placing emphasis on the efficacy of human action, or ‘agency’ (Sewell 1992), gives rise to theories that humans as active subjects, as opposed to passive objects of politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Hustedde & Ganowicz (2002) argue that community change agents need not be seen as powerless when faced with powerful structures, because cultural patterns can be transformed to influence or break down structural constraints that inhibit solidarity or capacity building.

Practitioners in this study had many stories to tell about the way people’s lives have been transformed as a result of community development processes. Others however, told stories where agency is seemingly less achievable. When asked about people overcoming their oppression one participant stated, “No, I’ve only been at it for seven years with Indigenous people, their history of oppression is too long” (Q6). Another participant who primarily works with refugees commented, “they may have legal citizenship, but they do not feel like they belong...they are still stereotyped and discriminated against” (V8).

To enable a sense of agency, a key theme that many participants discussed was “to create ways people can *meaningfully* participate” by “supporting people in what *they* want”. Therefore, inherent in this idea of agency is the notion that CD needs to be driven by those involved, from the grassroots. It is also about “creating spaces for relationships to develop” (Q9); and, “helping community leaders develop their own frameworks for practice” (Q4); and paradoxically at times it is about, “*not* doing something, not intervening, but “stay[ing] out of the way” (Q9). Others times it is about being quite purposeful and finding ways “to help the person be in touch with their power” (Q10).

Many ways people have been in touch with their power were discussed in the interviews. To name just a few, these included: people’s identity groups being recognized and formal spaces and organisations established; people having new ways to have a voice in matters that affect them; increased opportunities for education and employment; and people gaining resources for their communities. The end result of all these activities was that people “gained confidence”...“made new connections”...and “had support” (Q1) and these processes became “the launching pad” (Q1) for a host of activities, creating a widening sense of agency within their communities.

Question for reflection:

When asked to reflect on CD processes that have enabled people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation in the interviews, most participants told stories of individual lives being transformed. Only a few stories were told about groups of people who had benefited from CD.

Why do you think most people responded to this question this way?

4. Critical Processes that have enabled Transformation

Six main themes about critical processes that have enabled transformation were discussed in the interviews.

1. Workplace bases or spaces that are created for these processes were seen as important. As one participant said, “people need to feel that this is a place where I’m coming to connect...I’m coming to be myself in this space.....not to be ‘fixed’ by somebody” (V4). The ways practitioners organize their day was also seen as important. One practitioner commented, “it’s important to be available for unplanned (un-diarised) opportunities....when people just turn up” (V2); also, “creating an ethos about the place that when a person comes in I get away from the computer and say ‘welcome to you’ (V1). Community development processes are not necessarily lineal; meaning, can be stepped through systematically. Therefore, being prepared to work with people when they are ready to act was seen as an important strategy.

2. Making a meaningful connection with people is critical. One participant stated that the process starts with compassion for others: “She needed to believe that we were genuinely interested in helping her; listening to her; she needed to feel she could trust us....the first thing you have to feel is your compassion” (V7). This in turn leads to a sense of “hope” (Q10; V7) for community members; as people come to believe in “some possibility of making a contribution” (Q10); “a belief in themselves” (V3).

3. Many participants discussed the micro skills associated with the work. This involves “listening deeply” and “building trust”; and having “a deeper understanding of the complexity of the work” (Q2; V3; V8); “about what’s going on” (V1). Additionally, “respecting culture and being prepared to learn about it” (Q6; Q7) are seen as critical.

4. After groups have formed, the importance of “community analysis” (V1) with group members was raised. This is when people with concerns come to a shared understanding about “their common issues” (V9) - what is important to them and how to address their concerns. This creates “a sense of community” (Q10) and leads to various actions in which the group can engage. Other themes around action included the importance of finding “lots of ways people can participate” (V10) in CD processes; as well as “developing a reflective practice” (Q9, V1, V6) throughout the length of a piece of work. Three types of reflective practice were seen as critical for transformation: personal reflection for practitioners; collegial reflections if working in teams; and ongoing-shared reflection with community members as projects evolve.

5. Factors around time associated with CD processes was raised. It takes time “for ideas to germinate” (V11), and requires a certain amount of “tenacity” (V10) to keep at processes for lengths of time. One participant discussed the concept of “gently pushing” (V11) people through long-winded processes that they might find challenging. For example, gaining an educational qualification that will lead to employment or seeing extended projects through. The gentle pushing is about “seeing the potential” in people, and saying, ‘I believe in you; I believe you can’” (V11). Because the goals of the CD work are often substantial and processes to achieve them lengthy, other practitioners commented on the need to “have fun”

along the way (Q6; V3); “celebrations are important” (V2; V11) and small gains need to be acknowledged.

6. The last critical process discussed was about linking grassroots processes to “people who can help” (Q6; V10), such as “an intermediary structure, like Council...that gives the piece of work a profile....and may harness some resources” (Q5). Seen as “more strategic work” (Q2), this can have a direct effect on the intermediary structure itself. This is discussed below.

5. The Transformation of Powerful Structures

The sections above have discussed processes whereby people have had personally transformative experiences due to their involvement in community development. However, whilst all this work happens at the grassroots or whilst working at the community member / community groups level, this study is also investigating how societal structures can be transformed. Structures in our society might be imagined as located on the ‘vertical plane’ and working at the grassroots level might be imagined as on the ‘horizontal plane’. Underpinning this idea of powerful structures being transformed is the notion that they and their policies can be oppressive to individuals and various cohorts of citizens. The idea that CD work on the horizontal plane may directly influence structures on the vertical plane to address the root cause of oppression was discussed in the interviews. Four main themes emerged.

5.1 Yet to see powerful structures transformed

Several participants stated that they had yet to see powerful structures transformed, or if they had, it was “seldom” (V11) or “accidental or ad hoc” (Q9). A range of comments sum up this position, “I’ve not had that level of influence” (Q4); “I think that’s really difficult” (V5); “but something I still hope for” (V6). Comments about why influencing structures on the vertical plane is difficult included, “I think it’s something that happens at the highest levels....if someone at the top doesn’t take a specific interest, nothing will change” (V6); “messages get lost in the hierarchy” (V6); and “they [the structures] are bulky, heavy and cumbersome to move....they don’t have the agility for transformation” (V11).

5.2 Local Government transformed

Several participants told stories about processes where local government had directly been involved in CD processes in an enabling or empowering way; or where local government itself had changed as a result of a CD process. Many of these stories involved citizen advocacy processes, where the consciousness of a Councillor was raised about particular issues, or the direct input of citizens was included in the planning or visioning processes of local government. The kind of influence these processes have though is uncertain. For instance, at the conclusion of a story one participant stated, “expressed as a group those ideas have been heard and taken seriously...but, have they changed Council’s structure (?) no; have they changed the budget allocations of Council’s process (?), only incrementally; have they changed the way Councillors and the Lord Mayor think about the city (?), absolutely” (Q9).

These processes however, often “build legitimacy” (Q3) and provide “recognition” (V1) for particular groups and their views. They can also “change perceptions” (Q3) of people in power who have influence; and these are the type of changes CD practitioners are looking for

to benefit citizens and groups with whom they work. Many participants saw influencing local government as strategic CD work, summed up by one participant when he stated, “local government processes can often leverage resources and have fulcrum power as actions can connect to *council-wide* agendas” (Q9). This is significant because often CD processes are limited to the scope of councils’ social and community service departments.

When working to influence local government, or any other structures, it was seen as important to work with community members to develop a “community analysis” (Q9; V5). This is where community members’ ideas about why and how issues should be addressed are given equal weight with a “social analysis” (Q9; V5). A social analysis may be based on statistical or other forms of data or evidence, and can strengthen a community analysis around a particular concern, giving additional weight to citizen advocacy or planning processes.

5.3 Social Movements and Systemic Policy Advocacy

When responding to the questions about powerful structures being transformed other participants told stories of various campaigns that have affected social change. These national campaigns initiated by a groundswell from grassroots actions have created a more just Australian society. Campaigns mentioned were the Native Title campaign and reforms associated with the Migration Act.

Several Victorian participants discussed the state-wide infrastructure of 360 neighbourhood houses and learning centres, the 16 regional networker positions and how these link into the Victorian peak body which represents them. Over recent years several campaigns have raised the profile of and secured funding for these neighbourhood houses and regional networks. Their success has been attributed to “a combined effort involving members of neighbourhood houses and people who use services, workers, management committee members, regional networkers and the state peak body” (V4). Participant’s commented, “we made ourselves part of the introduction of serious social policy in Victoria” (V4); where it was possible to “advance neighbourhood houses’ capacity to respond to their communities” (V10). A story told of a Queensland example of this type of work involves a semi-formal network of 22 multicultural CD and policy-advocacy workers, located in peak bodies and neighbourhood centres across the state (Q1). Their efforts were able to change the way interpreter services could be accessed cost-free by migrants and refugees using government and non-government services.

In the Queensland campaign tactics involved highlighting government policy that was far behind national standards for this work, for example, “this is an absolute failure by the Government of Queensland in Access and Equity” (Q1). In the Victorian neighbourhood houses campaigns strategies involved highlighting the alignment between the state government policy *A Fairer Victoria* (Department of Planning and Community Development) and how the work of neighbourhood houses advances this policy. Therefore, a range of tactics is used when influencing government policy to bring about change, those that point out where community values align with government policy, and those that use more “shaming” (V11) tactics.

Various strategies have their advantages and disadvantages and are considered strategically by practitioners before they engage in these processes. It was clear that a number of practitioners in this study had hard-earned experience associated with the struggle for justice and equality for people affected by powerful structures. When discussing her involvement in policy

advocacy with local government, one participant commented, “it’s tricky”.... “because you want to go right to the edge and push them along with you, but you also don’t want to brake the tension wire, because if you do, they can [be] very vicious....[dispensing] retribution even” (V11).

5.4 The idea of Revolution

The community development literature alludes to the idea of revolution when it talks about processes that transform the structures of oppression that diminish people’s lives (Ledwith 2005); (see also Eade 1997 & 2003, Kenny 2002 & 2006, Ife & Tesoriero 2006, and Reisch 2005). Yet, at least three participants in this study, who grew up in times of global social activism during the 1960’s and 1970’s, discussed their ambivalence to the idea of revolution. As one participant put it, “when I started out we believed that we could opt out of the system and create an alternative that was *other* than the system....now we know all of us live *in* the system...it’s all interconnected” (Q10). These practitioners highlighted the idea that the meta narratives of revolution are gone. Small revolutions are the order of the day, with modest goals, and where “small wins” (V5, Q6,) are seen as important. Other participants commented, “a lot of stuff happens subcutaneously...in small places....these changes are creeping changes, they keep their heads low” (V1); “they fly under the radar” (V10). Rather than “smash the system” (V1) as activism from times past tried to do, activism now looks more like “evolving the alternative from the ground up”... and “as networks become denser” (V1) they create a groundswell of action to affect change and therefore, “cannot be dismissed” (V1).

Questions for reflection:

Is the notion of “a creeping revolution” the contemporary approach needed for our globalised world?

Have I got these ideas of transformation and powerful structures right?

Are there any gaps, other ideas about critical factors not mentioned?

6. Subaltern Counter Structures

If the contemporary notion of revolution is about evolving the alternative from the ground up then theories that highlight these processes can be helpful to CD. Nancy Fraser’s (1997) theory of “subaltern counter-publics” are spaces or structures where “alternative conversations” (V10) can occur; those that are inclusive of a range of opinions and counter “hegemonic” (V10) discourses that subjugate people. This is not about a group of radicals opting out or shouting at a dominant group, but as Fraser (1997:93) suggests, it is about culturally diverse publics being included into an “ever-widening public sphere”.

One participant’s comments resonated with Fraser’s theoretical standpoint when he commented, “so I don’t lead a revolution by people at the bottom trying to overthrow the people at the top”....it is about “reframing every relationship, one at a time, from hierarchical to mutual relationships...creating spaces for equals to participate....where genuine collective decision-making” can occur (Q10).

Relevant particularly to working with Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, other participants discussed going against the dominant policy trends for mainstreaming and integration. They highlighted their belief in the importance of culturally

diverse groups needing their own spaces (Q5; V5; V9), in which people feel comfortable and safe and “where culture can be kept alive” (Q4).

Another view highlighted that subaltern spaces are often where “we discuss the undiscussable” (Q2). One participant (V7) told the story of a potentially volatile situation with Muslims and non-Muslims involved in a neighbourhood house English class. Occurring after September 11, 2001, class members found it possible to have dialogue about the violence that had occurred in the USA that day. This was an ongoing piece of work that took on transformative qualities when those involved made a commitment to stay engaged in the dialogical process even though personal worldviews and values were being challenged. Subaltern structures like this example, have the potential to “liberate everybody....and help us all to be more human” (Q10). In this case, having a safe, well-supported space for people to explore their identities, challenge stereotypes, and learn from each other made this piece of work transformative.

Question for reflection:

When discussing ideas of citizenship and groups participants mainly focused on culture and identity groups.

Is class a meaningless category when thinking about identity and CD these days?

7. Structuring Work between Levels or Domains

In relation to ‘structuring work’, there is a broad-based literature whose theories are ostensibly about mobilizing and sustaining community development work.² Progressive community development theorists, whose thoughts are often shaped by a global analysis of poverty, argue for a practice that makes local and global connections; or at least a practice that is informed by a global analysis, and attempts to go beyond the local.³

7.1 The importance of seeking change at more than one level

Whether or not a practitioner attempts to go beyond the local may be due their individual frameworks for practice. As one participant commented, “I think part of it depends on the worker’s framework, so if you are doing structural community development, you are going to work for change at several different levels, and you are going to influence the democratic process (Q7). This emphasis was reiterated with comments such as, “wherever possible I try to look at some policy direction to see if I can influence that” (V5); and, “the vision is to structure it up and make it more powerful than keeping it at the margins....more visibility, more capacity [to affect change] at other levels” (Q5).

² For example: Batten & Batten 1988; Henderson & Thomas 2002; Kahn 1994; Kenny 2006; O'Regan & O'Connor 1989; Thomas 1976; Twelvetrees 1991. Much of this literature discusses work based in local communities.

³ **Educational influences**

The questions asked in the interviews on the topic of structuring work elicited a range of viewpoints. Although this study was not aiming to undertake comparative research between the practice approaches of Queenslanders and Victorians, responses to this subject matter on structuring did vary between the two states. The majority of Queensland participants have been trained at the University of Queensland (UQ) in a particular tradition of CD practice (see for example, Kelly 2008; Westoby & Owen 2009; and Lathouras, forthcoming), and this did have a bearing on their responses. Other non-UQ trained Queensland participants and the Victorian participants come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds (eg undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications in Social Work, CD, Social Science & Humanities; Education; Business; and Public Health. However, this aside, it was noted that differing approaches to structuring CD work were unique to each practitioner.

7.2 Broad range of approaches

How structuring takes place included many stories about forming networks or “consortiums of networks” (V12) and partnerships (V2, V3, V4, Q9); forming references groups to inform particular pieces of work (Q7; Q8; V8; V9); and hosting social policy and practice forums to raise issues and develop collective analysis about responses to these (Q8; Q9; V2; V8). Two participants discussed developing “strategic alliances” with the business and corporate sectors to bring about change (Q3; Q8). Others discussed the organisational structural arrangements necessary to have the freedom to enact the vision for a piece of work, whilst having legal and financial security to complete that work (Q4; Q9; Q10; V1).

PART 3 – RESEARCH QUESTION

Q3: What opportunities, issues and challenges do practitioners face when they put this into practice?

8. Challenges with structuring

Four main themes emerged when discussing challenges for structuring CD work.

1. Lack of processes and models to go beyond the local level. Several participants discussed that they used a more “intuitive” (V2; V3; V6) approach to their CD work and “without models” (V6) or “a clear process” (Q1) to engage in, this type of work can be difficult. Another commented, “structuring is always part of every process, but we rarely do it well enough” (Q9). And another commented, “it’s really complex work.....and support for workers to engage in this type of practice is lacking” (Q5). “We don’t have good mentoring systems in place for community work practitioners” (Q5), and this can leave workers feeling like the work is too “risky” having “no confidence to ‘give it a go’” (Q5).
2. Finding leadership to engage in collective citizen advocacy. Others discussed the challenges associated with “finding leadership” among community members (Q8; V5), “people who can think more strategically” (V5) and who will be willing to work towards change at more systemic levels. Practitioners may join with community members to engage in this kind of work, but as one participant commented, “you’ll always get a few ‘in there’ community members who have that passion and motivation....but it’s so much work [for them]...and the process doesn’t mean that it will actually influence decisions....we hope so, but it’s not guaranteed” (Q1).

This lack of certainty about assured outcomes was repeated, and seemed to reflect an aspiration about the *potential* of the work. For example, one participant working with Indigenous people to reclaim their land discussed the very long-winded process people are going through with the state government. They have engaged in a “series of small steps...won some battles and lost some...and are currently having a breather before fighting again” (Q4). Aspirations like these were common, for instance when participants said: “what may be a small success for change today, is potentially the thing that creates the capacity for substantial change down the track” (V10). And, “the challenge is knowing, something like long-term change or structural change, for instance looking at

federal government policy when you're a local government worker, and *knowing* how your day-to-day action might contribute towards change" (V12).

3. Sustaining partnerships. Some participants discussed the challenges associated with partnering with other organisations over the long-term, particularly when key workers move out of a partner organisation. Tools like Memorandum's of Understanding and strategic planning processes are used to create shared values and goals however using these tools does not necessarily ensure these are sustained (Q8). Many participants placed emphasis on three critical factors to sustain long-term CD processes: attending to relationships; ensuring there is an on-going collective analysis amongst key players; and maintaining an on-going commitment to co-operation.
4. Policy and planning infrastructure. Another contrast that emerged between the two states was the quantity of policy and planning infrastructure that is available to practitioners to affect change around particular issues. Particularly in the neighbourhood house sector, but in other sectors as well, Victorian planning processes seem to have placed emphasis on building a layer of infrastructure that can connect local needs and infrastructure with government policy or peak body infrastructure. A Queenslander's perspective is, "I don't think we've had strong policy debates at a community-sector level around a lot of issues...we don't create the right spaces for them....and we are good at 'patching things up', making them work 'well enough'" (Q5). "We put people's needs before structural change processes....we're spread too thinly to work at both ends and we make the choice to support people and then we are left with the structures not really shifting (Q5). This sentiment about focusing on people's immediate needs rather than structural change was echoed by a rural Victorian participant when he said, "let's have some ambitious aims, instead of trying to scrape by...which in the end is just disadvantaging people constantly....practitioners need to get their voice heard, but it's too tempting to say, 'oh, I'll help this person today' instead of, 'I'll voice my opinion in this forum', where I don't know if it will make a difference" (V12).

Question for reflection:

Structuring beyond the local is seen as critical, yet what will make a difference to ensure its effectiveness?

9. Barriers to Transformation and Other Challenges for Practice

In addition to challenges related to structuring CD work, a host of other concerns were raised in the interviews, either about barriers community members face, individually or collectively; or challenges practitioners face when attempting to bring about social change. These can be clustered into four areas and the key themes that emerged are discussed.

9.1 Societal hegemony and colonisation

Societal hegemony is a major barrier that “works towards maintaining the status quo” (Q5; V10), perpetuating the belief that there are winners and losers in every society and therefore *not* attaining equality in terms of participation in civil society is acceptable, the norm. Structures, policies and processes that reinforce disadvantage, that subjugate groups of people and continue to “colonise” (Q2; Q4; Q6; V12) both people and “community space” (Q10; V4) permeate, and these are the backdrops for CD practice.

The overall impact of colonization, “treating people like clients” (Q10), is that “people give up on themselves” (V11); “it pacifies people” (Q4) and “they lose hope” (V11). Facing multiple barriers to civil participation reduces people’s abilities to even have awareness “that change can happen” (Q5; Q8), that their lives could be improved. Many barriers to civil participation were discussed including, “language barriers” and “access to services” (Q1; V5; V8; V9), as well as the impact of racism (Q1) and the media’s stereotyping of cultural groups (V8), to name just a few.

9.2 Government social policy and the impact on the sector

As the majority of practitioners in this study currently work in the funded social services sector, engaging in CD work in this context raised significant issues.

Political imperatives over social imperatives

1. “Short political cycles” (Q5) tend to emphasise short-term goals, and “centralised policy making” (Q3) processes tend to be “inflexible” (Q6) to local needs and conditions. This “one size fits all” (Q3) mentality runs counter to the fundamental principles of “responsiveness”, being “flexible”, and tailoring processes to suit the needs of the people involved in CD processes. These themes were repeatedly raised throughout the interviews.

Implications for NGO’s who enter into contractual arrangements with government

2. Funded CD programs are “outcomes focused” (V10), often with “unrealistic milestones and expectations” (Q2), and designed by “policy makers who don’t understand what community building is really about” (V12). This creates many barriers for CD workers in their desire to take the time it requires to adequately engage in processes they believe are required for people-led social change to occur.

3. Issues about short-term funding for CD work were discussed by many participants, with some questioning why CD is seen differently from other types of human services that are funded in an ongoing fashion. The ‘sustainability’ ethos that is often tagged with CD work, as well as the ‘we aim to do ourselves out of a job’ viewpoint often inherent to capacity-building approaches, feeds into and may contribute to justifications by Government for funding short-term CD projects.

4. Other concerns about government funding were raised. Some felt that more money was needed for them to do their work appropriately (V2; V3; V9). Yet, another participant

worries that community organisations are becoming “dependant on government funding” (V1), leaving them open to being controlled or thought of as quasi-government organisations. Participants echoed this sentiment when they made comments such as, “increasingly, organisations take the definitions of what and who they are from the Department” (Q2); and, “[over the years] the edge of critique seems to have been washed away” (V12); “anything with a radical edge is discouraged” (V10).

5. The “increasing levels of accountability around government contract management” (Q5) was another theme causing concern to many participants. One participant told a story of her request for support and flexibility around deadlines when she was addressing a newly introduced accountability process. She commented, [the department officer] “behaved like a zombie gaoler....just saying in this automaton way, ‘well that’s how it is’....they aren’t community resource officers, they’re community compliance officers” (Q2).

The work is not understood or valued

6. Another theme raised by many participants was the fact that CD is not understood or valued. Several participants referred to line managers or management committee’s not understanding the purpose and methods of CD work (Q7; Q8; V2). A different perspective was that CD practitioners themselves do a disservice to the practice when they only “talk about warm and fuzzy things” (V7). They may not have a clear language or analysis to communicate the benefits of their work to a range of audiences, such as funding bodies.

7. Many participants critiqued the dominance of a service delivery or “welfare” culture” (V7). ““Doing for’ gets in the way of development” (V11); as does the “professionalization” (Q9) of the sector, where professionals “take over” (Q2), or “impose their view” (V9) and also where people are ““done to’....it destroys trust” (V2). These types of processes may be employed in a worker’s desire to meet prescribed outcomes laid down by social policy or organisational imperatives.

8. Other concerns about the lack of research (Q5) in CD, and poor evaluation tools and mechanisms (Q5; V4; V10) were raised. One participant commented that even if a piece of work is evaluated rigorously and proven to have effective outcomes, this does not necessarily translate into securing funding for current or future projects (Q9). Lack of research and poor evaluation processes mean that it is difficult for practitioners to provide the evidence they need to substantiate claims about the effectiveness of CD (Q5; V5; V9).

Human resource management

9. The final sector-related concerns were made with regard to human resource management issues. In Queensland many CD practitioner roles have “dual responsibilities”, including coordination of centres and programs, line-management responsibilities and administrative functions, in addition to their community building roles (Q2; Q5; Q8; Q9). This means emphasis is often given to priorities other than CD work. In Victoria a trend to replace neighbourhood CD workers with ‘administrators’ or ‘facility managers’ was raised (V4; V10). These practitioners stated that this trend is taking place because of the increased accountabilities of contract management and risk management priorities.

10. Others raised their concern about the part-time status of their roles (Q2; Q6; V3) and because of heavy workloads feel obligated to work beyond paid hours. A final concern was with the “out-migration” (V10) of experienced CD practitioners to government or other positions due to “low wages” (V3; V10) and the loss of skills and knowledge this is having within the non-government sector.

9.3 CD practitioner skills and practice

Lack of skills and practice experience in general was another strong theme in the interviews. There is a “lack of understanding” (V4) about the aims of the work; and “lack of good training and mentoring” (Q5) for practitioners. So much so one practitioner fears, “we’re in danger of losing what community work is about in terms of it’s structural change capacity....we’ll lose that aspect of the work; we’ll lose people’s vision of it’s potential or even have an aspiration *at all* around it” (Q5). A complementary perspective included the concern about CD ‘fads’, “like Assets Based Community Development”, can be “disempowering” if practitioners do not have an understanding of “first principles”, but apply methods “straight out of the textbook” (V10). The uncritical application of methods has the potential to further marginalize members of the community and inexperienced practitioners without mentors or line-managers who understand the work, can inadvertently fall into these traps.

Another concern relates to the idea that social justice is about elevating whole communities; and changing the life chances of large numbers of people, not just individuals (Healy 2005:177; Ife & Tesoriero 2006:20; Mullaly 2002:32). The perspective that CD has lost this emphasis, being satisfied “when only one or two” community members “move forward” (V11) was raised and seen a product of the dominant neo-liberal, individualised view of society that permeates the sector.

Work in local government contexts has a different set of constraints. All the local government practitioners discussed their concerns with the bureaucratic processes they are compelled to use, often requiring them to be constantly brokering or bridging community needs with the systems of local government. One participant explained that these brokering processes are necessary to ensure the community’s “voice is translated with it’s own accent and meaning to the organisation....so the city becomes a better place for everyone to live in and they [all community members] benefit from everything Council has to offer” (Q9).

A final concern raised relates to practitioners working appropriately in cross-cultural contexts (Q2; Q6; V8; V12). They emphasised the need to develop a true understanding of people’s concerns and needs. One participant commented that “we lack subtlety” requiring practitioners to ask, “how do we work respectfully and appropriately....specifically with what people are needing” (Q2), therefore ensuring worker agendas do not dominate. Having an awareness of how practice is shaped by practitioners’ own values, worldviews and aspirations for a piece of work are important factors for ensuring culturally appropriate approaches.

9.4 The personal costs associated with practitioner activism

A number of participants discussed the costs CD work can have on them personally. Practitioners stated, “you’ve got to be in to change it” (V12), and it often involves “acts of subversion” (Q1; Q10). Yet personally sustaining oneself for the long haul, particularly through long-term processes can be taxing. Some practitioners commented on their experience of poor health associated with their activism against oppression in society. Pragmatic responses to these and other personal costs associated with the work can be summarized by the comments, “you become aware of the time and energy change takes...so you pick your battles” (Q1; V10) and, “you look for small wins” “gains” or “shifts” (Q5; Q7; V4; V5); “its an incremental process” (Q7).

10. Opportunities

Despite the many barriers and challenges CD practitioners face in their daily work, those in this study are positive-minded, hopeful and pro-active change agents. One practitioner summed it up by saying, “to quote Pablo Neruda, the Latin American poet, ‘they can cut down the flowers but they can never stop the coming of the Spring’...that’s what excites me, even though we are faced with overwhelming odds, even though we fight many battles and loose most of them, there’s this eruption of the human spirit....that wants to grow, wants to change...I just see it in people” (Q10).

Several participants discussed the opportunistic nature of CD. For individuals and groups CD provides opportunities for “growth” (V7; V8) and “it transforms people’s lives” (V4). People start to see “they are able to do something for themselves” (V3), and they can “have control over their lives” (Q7). One participant summed it up by saying, “it’s the promise and the possibilities that things can happen, you *can* make a difference, that’s always exciting” (V7). Others discussed the notion of the “ripple effects” (Q8) of processes that lead to new ventures and opportunities; how the “diversity of member’s knowledge” (V9) creates collective wisdom about how to create change. Another commented, “what always excites me is the creativity [associated with the work]...it’s so nourishing” (Q3).

These types of opportunities for individual and group empowerment above were discussed, as well as other types of opportunities for CD work in general and for the CD sector.

10.1 A new epoch

Several participants commented on this period in history, being an epoch where “structural change is inevitable” (V10). “There seems to be some kind of, if not convergence, but some kind of listening to one another again about the need for other ways of living together like co-housing, like local economies, different forms of organizing” (V1); and thinking about things “that will be sustainable in a range of dimensions, ecologically, socially and economically” (V10). Another discussed his anticipation “about the possibilities of a future that’s run by [our current] young people....they wouldn’t know what community development means, but they live it and make it part of their daily lives...whether advocating for climate justice or organizing a reggae event, things like that” (Q9).

Others commented about this time in history being where “the ‘alternative’ is not so alternative anymore” (V1); “I think all those movements of people, simplifying their lives, really thinking about what matters....considering the wonder of ordinary life, *that* is what CD is about” (Q2). Others echoed this sentiment, “we encourage people to realise their aspirations, we include them in our common life” (Q10). Another discussed that “The Commons were lost 500 years ago when Europeans invaded the world” (V1), these ideas of collectivity need to be reclaimed.

10.2 What makes change happen

For one participant, change happens by having “an analysis of power and using CD to politicize processes....and by providing multiple pathways for people to participate in these processes” (V10). Another perspective was, “you have to address it at both ends, at the community building practice end and the policy reform or development end” (V11). Echoing

this sentiment, another participant discussed the notion of “untouched business” (V8); meaning that a systems-wide approach to development is required to bring about substantial change and this is largely left “untouched”.

Other comments placed emphasis on collegial relationships, “fellow travelers” (V11), who are “like-minded, which first gives you strength, but then leads to the creation of networks with people who might be influential or strategic...you can only do these things [structural change] together” (V12). In the same vein, another comment was, “we need more structural CD workers and then we may get there” (V5).

Other participants placed emphasis on building new kinds of structures, those that provide alternatives to dominant ways of doing business. With like-minded people, “collectives of organisations” (Q5) look for possibilities and “really make a difference” (Q5); and, “thinking organizationally, it is about developing new models which create connectivity, where we celebrate ‘overlap’ rather than the ‘niche’”. “There is a problem with niches and uniqueness, because it separates you from everyone else...we are much more interested in [identifying] what is our *common* base, our overlap...individualism, niche-creation is the best way for those who govern to divide and rule” (V1).

Question for reflection:

Ideas discussed about opportunities for structural CD tended to be largely aspirational in nature.

How can these aspirations be moved to concrete action?

Conclusion

Community development is almost universally understood as a healthy phenomenon, leading to greater social justice and the extension of participatory democracy (Miller & Ahmad 1997). Susan Kenny (2002) discusses what she calls the central challenge for community development - to identify effective strategies, globally as well as nationally and locally to maintain the purpose of community development in the new and complex contexts we encounter in contemporary society. The participants in this study are doing just that.

Questions for reflection:

Structural dimensions of community development practice are complex and multi-faced.

Having read this paper, what are the critical issues you identify that help or hinder the type of practice being discussed?

Are there some normative processes that should be engaged in to give practitioners some assurance about achieving desired outcomes?

What are your top two or three tips for action?

Legend – CD Contexts of Practitioners

	Queensland CD practitioners	Years of experience		Victorian CD practitioners	Years of experience
Q1	Regional / Geographic / CALD / NGO	4	V1	Urban / Geographic / NGO	43
Q2	Regional / Geographic / NGO	15	V2	Urban / CALD / Indigenous / NGO	3
Q3	Regional / Housing / NGO	28	V3	Urban / Geographic / NGO	10
Q4	Rural / Indigenous / NGO	16	V4	Urban / Network / NGO	15
Q5	Urban / Geographic / NGO	30	V5	Urban / Network / Local Govt	10
Q6	Urban / Indigenous / NGO	7	V6	Urban / CALD / Local Govt	5
Q7	Urban / Aging / Peak Body	17	V7	Urban / Geographic / Local Govt	11
Q8	Regional / Geographic / NGO	4	V8	Urban / CALD / Indigenous	10
Q9	Urban / Youth / Local Govt	23	V9	Urban / Health / University	5
Q10	Urban / Geographic / Network	38	V10	Rural / Network / NGO	12
			V11	Urban / Geographic / NGO	34
			V12	Rural / CALD / Local Govt	7

Categories:

Urban, Regional or Rural

Geographic (generalist, whole-of-community)

Focus on particular groups of community members eg CALD, indigenous, youth, aging, or network of other practitioners / neighbourhood houses

Issue specific – eg health, housing

Organisational base – eg non-Government organisation (eg co-operative, CD association, neighbourhood centre, or larger state-wide or national NGO with a locality focus); local government; peak body or university

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Questions for Reflection

Have I accurately interpreted specific points you made? Does this paper reflect the major points you were making? Are there any major components missing of what could be thought of as structural CD?

When themes have been discussed with opposing or diverse viewpoints, how do you think these points talk to each other or intersect? How do you make sense of the contradictions?

There is a strong tradition of CD that advocates our priority should always be with ‘the poorest of the poor’, however, there is a critique that by locating community development workers into low socio-economic communities (as they often are) and not working more systemically, or across communities, is ineffectual. *What are your thoughts on this?*

When asked to reflect on CD processes that have enabled people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation in the interviews, most participants told stories of individual lives being transformed. Only a few stories were told about groups of people who had benefited from CD. *Why do you think most people responded to this question this way?*

Is the notion of “a creeping revolution” the contemporary approach needed for our globalised world? Have I got these ideas of transformation and powerful structures right? Are there any gaps, other ideas about critical factors not mentioned?

When discussing ideas of citizenship and groups participants mainly focused on culture and identity groups. *Is class a meaningless category when thinking about identity and CD these days?*

Structuring beyond the local is seen as critical, yet what will make a difference to ensure its effectiveness?

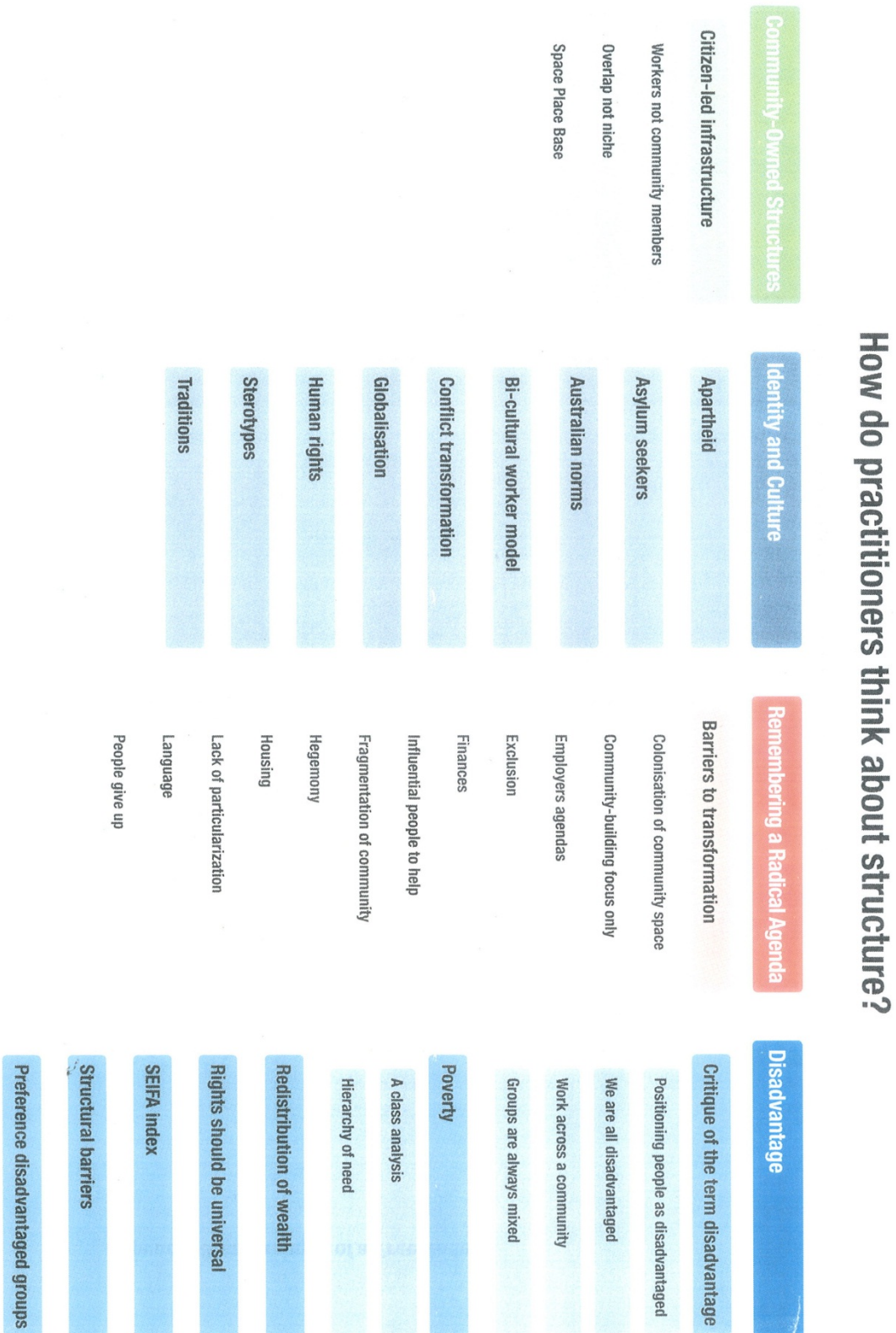
Ideas discussed about opportunities for structural CD tended to be largely aspirational in nature. *How can these aspirations be moved to concrete action?*

Structural dimensions of community development practice are complex and multi-faced. *Having read this paper, what are the critical issues you identify that help or hinder the type of practice being discussed?*

Are there some normative processes that should be engaged in to give practitioners some assurance about achieving desired outcomes?

What are your top two or three tips for action?

Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node



From this discussion, therefore, despite the form that community development groups take to formalise and further their goals, three key points seem imperative. They include the quality of the relationships amongst those involved, an awareness of the risks associated with structuring and ways in which groups can mitigate against those risks.

Story # 4 Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action

In a similar vein, V1, also working on a voluntary basis and with high theory action-congruency, answered the question on structuring by telling the story of a non-trading co-operative developed by community members. In this case, the co-operative has become the infrastructure to support and enable a myriad of community development projects. V1 provided many examples of projects and activities that have been undertaken in the co-operative's 10-year history.

A distinguishing feature of this example of structuring is the co-operative's physical presence in the community. It is like a network, in the sense that its members have pathways in to connect with each other and engage in many different activities, and it has created a physical base where people can meet. As a result, many ad hoc or unplanned interactions occur because people visit the physical space. This cross-pollination across the physical space enables the conditions for community members to take unstructured opportunities to meet new people, build relationships and develop ideas for community building activities together. V1 articulates the co-operative's stance:

It is a gathering place where people can come and have good ideas. An incubation ground to translate them into practice (V1).

Both the examples discussed above, Q10's auspice association that supports the networks' activities and V1's co-operative demonstrate innovation when structuring community development. Over a substantial period of time, the people involved in these groups have collectively acted to create structures they can use to further their aims.

V8, the final practitioner in this category of practice at the local level only, like Q4, Q10 and V1, demonstrated high theory-action congruency. V8's approach to structuring community

development work is similar to others who form networks with local community members and form reference groups to guide work across areas affecting a range of groups in a particular locality. Whereas the others in this category who are working in the social services system had low theory-action congruency, V8's is high. V8 comes from a cultural background where community development work is seen more like a vocation, as opposed to a professional career. The following quote illustrates this:

I am already helping my community. Why not skill-up myself in this area? So that is why I moved to community development – it is (part of me) religiously, culturally, naturally, it all adds up. We don't have the word 'volunteers' in our dictionary, no (V8).

With the comment about "volunteers," V8 is referring to a culturally specific tradition of community service as something routinely undertaken in the V8's ethnic community. Volunteering for work implies choice, either to volunteer or not to volunteer. Therefore, although not used as a factor for considering theory-action congruency across the whole sample, a sense of *vocation* for community work is clearly central to V8's practice. Another possible factor for the high congruency rating is V8's own refugee background, which has instilled an attitude of optimism about taking every opportunity to build a new life in this country and build communities that will benefit all.

In summary, several key points about structuring emerged from this discussion. Firstly, local level community development provides opportunities for community members to engage politically through a variety of group work processes. Secondly, these processes include common features such as egalitarian relationships, developing a sense of mutuality amongst members and inclusion. Thirdly, vehicles are created and used to sustain projects, which people believe improve their communities. This includes various types of structures, demonstrating there is no *singular way* to create them. However, the fourth point is that, in the structuring process, particularly when new structures are being created, group members need to be conscious of the risks associated with different kinds of structured arrangements. The process of weighing up potential risks and benefits will ensure their collective values and goals are not overwhelmed by the realities of establishing and maintaining the actual structure.

Regarding the theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) of practitioners in this category, it has been shown that the organisational base for community development and how the base enables practitioners to be responsive to community members is critical. The three practitioners working outside the social service system are creating community-owned networks and organisations entirely responsive to the needs of the constituents associated with those networks and organisations. Compared with the others who practice within social service contexts, this group has fewer constraints imposed on their practice. For example, they can avoid constraints such as those an employer may make on an employee or constraints associated with funding contracts the employing organisation has, compelling the practitioner to work in particular ways. This suggests these three practitioners would have a strong sense of work autonomy and this could be a contributing factor for their high rating for espoused practice theory and theory-in-use congruency.

Although they have created or are creating organisational bases for themselves and the groups with which they work, compared with those located within the social services system, these types of entities could be considered as being on the 'fringe'. Organisations on the fringes have no less importance in the overall makeup of groups in society attempting to bring about social change. However, the question that begs to be asked as a result of this discussion is to what extent do practitioners, those with a sense of agency, have to be part of the social services system to effect structural change?

The next section discusses the type of practice, utilised by five practitioners, whose practice has joint aims: developing communities *and* changing the system.

6.5 Work at both levels, local and beyond, but where distinct connections with community members are deliberately made between the two.

Structuring for five practitioners, Q1, Q3, Q7, V5 and V9, means they are working at a local level and structure their work beyond the local level. They are attempting to make distinct connections between work at both levels by involving community members in the majority of processes. Structuring for these practitioners means community members are involved, as far as possible, in citizen-led processes. This group is also attempting to effect change within the

social service system or other systems through a range of strategies including participating in state-wide networks, building regional infrastructure and systems advocacy.

Compared with the practitioner's work discussed in sections 6.4 and 6.6, this was the most cohesive group regarding their theory-action congruency, which was high for all five. They have a structural analysis and are looking to influence processes where oppression originates. Their employing organisations are supportive of their work and structures have been created to carry forward agendas into realms beyond the local level. They have clear processes through which they are working, or if processes are not clear, they apply an action-research approach to experiment, then evaluate and try something new to attain desired goals.

Story # 5 – Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform

Q1, for the past four years, has worked at a local level to establish a range of community development groups with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. In addition, Q1 worked with a regional network comprised of both community members from culturally diverse backgrounds and practitioners who practice in the CALD field. For this same period, Q1 has also been integral to the development of a state-wide network of 22 community development workers and policy advocacy workers who aim to respond to the needs of migrants and refugees across Queensland. Therefore, Q1 is working at three levels – local geographic communities, regionally, and at a state-wide level.

A clear example of how the state-wide work has benefited community members was discussed in the interview. Q1 was involved in the formation a specific working group to reform the state government's social policy on the provision of free interpreter services for Queenslanders for whom English is not their first language. The process involved collecting stories from all over the state of significant disadvantage in areas such as health, housing, crime and violence that may have been prevented if free interpreter services had been available and language barriers removed. The working group lobbied the state government and the policy was changed.

Q1 emphasised just how pivotal the community development element of this process was to its success by commenting,

With that working group, I think community development was really important, that we were local; really, really important (Q1).

The community development processes included making connections with people affected by issues, hearing their stories and providing compelling evidence to feed into the social policy reform process.

However, despite this success story, Q1 was one of the practitioners who showed ambivalence when asked about ‘powerful structures being transformed because of community development’, discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.3). Q1’s quote in Chapter Five, “to a degree....there’s always more struggle”, related to this story about the access to interpreters campaign. The ongoing “struggle” now involves Q1’s work to keep the pressure on government departments to ensure the policy change continues to be established across all the relevant government programs, a large and slow process. By monitoring the implementation of the policy change, the state-wide network is ensuring the effectiveness of their social change work through the policy’s institutionalisation.

Therefore, in terms of structuring community development work, this example has shown how a locally-based practitioner has a structural analysis about a source of oppression for one group of people in society, people from culturally diverse backgrounds. The structuring work to reduce disadvantage for this group of community members has involved work at three levels, local, regional and state-wide work, and work with government and non-government groups or entities. The ongoing nature of this work, to institute change at both a policy level and at an operational level, is contributing to its sustainability. Community members’ experiences and aspirations, as well as their bilingual skills, have been integral components to this successful piece of work.

Story # 6 – Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work

Q7 told the story of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Solidarity group, comprised of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members. These people originally came together to inform themselves about racism and learn more about ATSI histories and

culture. For the past nine years, they have engaged in a range of projects with both relationship-development and educational aims. Q7 discussed a number of key features to structuring this work when answering the interview question.

I do believe in shared decision-making. I think that's really important for my work, to be informed by the people that the role exists for. I think that's fundamental, to listen to the people, to work with small groups of people around some of the issues that you might be seeking with them, to address the issues they're telling you about. The ATSI Solidarity group, while that got resourced by workers, it's become more and more independent as a group; sort of mutually resourcing the workers and the workers resourcing the group. They're the experts on their lives; they're the people who will know how an action will work. The group then started developing actions. There are people in the group who really focus on the action side, and there are people who come to connect and learn more too (Q7).

I asked Q7 if it was common practice to have a group that can hold a range of reasons why people may be participating, for example, in the Solidarity group, an orientation around *various actions* and an orientation around *building connections* and *education*. Q7 commented,

Sure, *that* group can (Q7, original emphasis).

Q7's narrative suggests several things about approaches to structuring. Firstly, that Q7 *facilitates* processes where members of the group deliberate together, arrive at a shared analysis and make decisions *as a group*, as opposed to a practitioner making decisions alone or with other practitioners, which is a different feature of other structuring practice discussed in the next section.

Secondly, although the group has developed a range of actions, pathways into the group are *not just* task or action-oriented. The group aims to keep creating connections with newcomers and has an emphasis on education and building strong relationships. It does this through its many activities in the wider community and their ongoing internal group discussions. This also suggests that the group is open enough to include new people and their ideas despite how sophisticated or developed the Solidarity group's actions have become.

This could also be a strategy for keeping the group energized and enhancing its ability to sustain itself over time, as new people and new energy have a replenishing effect on the group and its actions.

Thirdly, the group *makes connections with others beyond their locality* by forming bridges with people in society who also have an interest in Indigenous affairs. This indicates that the group has an analysis that there needs to be connections with groups and organisations outside their immediate sphere, perhaps to assist the group to further its own aims, or for the group to be an influence within those spheres. In this regard, Q7's story shows that community members are exposed to and gain experience in this aspect of structuring community development work, that is, bridging with organisations and institutions in society. They do this when, for example, members of the Solidarity group have opportunities to talk and build relationships with government bureaucrats, academics and others who represent diverse groups within the wider community.

Therefore, in terms of structuring community development, this example has shown how a practitioner with a structural analysis about racism and the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples is working to bring about social change. Personal connections between people are breaking down barriers across a range of historical divides. Also, people based in local communities and people based across institutions in society are together working towards justice and equality.

Story # 7 Building Regional Structure as a Vehicle to Reclaim a Developmental Agenda

Another Queensland practitioner in this category, Q3, told a story of work in the Community Housing sector, where Q3's current work involves establishing a community-based regional housing company. Q3's story discussed a time in social housing policy history where community development work with tenants living in community housing influenced and improved state government social housing policy. The following quote, however, harks back to that previous era because Q3 also discussed how housing social policy has significantly changed since that time. Q3 perceives that, driven by economic imperatives, the social housing policy context has now become more about getting a roof over people's heads than providing a stable home. The policies regarding eligibility for housing and allocation of

houses has become rigid, centralised and regulated. This system is currently constraining community-based housing service providers from working developmentally, that is, working responsively to community members' needs, as Q3 had been able to do in the past.

In the days when innovative practice was supported it was recognised that community-housing workers practiced in a certain way that was providing tenants with a whole lot more value adding than just a house...citizenship. The practice influenced the state about what makes for good housing provision, not just in the community-housing sector. But that's being rapidly deconstructed at the moment (Q3).

Q3 is lamenting the loss of a system that was once pivotal to working with the wider community to support the inclusion of more vulnerable community members - people who are homeless, or are at risk of homelessness. Because of this analysis about the shift in policy, Q3's current work has a vision "to build a community-owned regional company to deliver housing based on community development values and principles". Responding to the current political realities, Q3's structuring work now is two-fold: firstly, to create new infrastructure, a community-owned regional company that will carry weight and therefore be more influential in its advocacy work, and secondly, to be a vehicle to increase community housing tenants' participation in society and their citizenship.

Whereas the two previous examples in this section, from Q1 and Q7, involved the start of new work entirely from scratch, this example of structuring community development is reclaiming the developmental aspects of a previously successful system and working to modify something that already exists. Q3 is working regionally, forming a new housing company, a structure for advocacy; and working locally across the region through an existing community-based housing organisation. This organisation is providing housing that enables community members' to act as citizens in their communities, despite the circumstances that led them to need low-cost housing.

Two final practitioners in this category, V5 and V9, are also making explicit links with community members to advance issues in realms at a local level and beyond. V9's work was discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.5), the community development elements of a formal action-research project to prevent diabetes. V9 has set up an advisory group to provide input

into the project, with representatives drawn from a range of people, community members and professionals from various ethnic backgrounds and Indigenous Australians.

In a similar fashion, when working in a state-wide peak body, V5 sought representation from community members across the state to feed into social policy development and advocacy processes. In this case, V5 was the peak body worker that was undertaking the policy advocacy process after seeking input from community members.

I do like to network quite a lot and work with different groups to further my CD work. And wherever possible, I try to look at some policy direction to see if I can influence that, even though that might not be in my project brief. I always try to look a bit more structurally. I had an aged-care advisory group, which consisted of local ethnic groups and we met monthly. We made sure we had regional and rural representation. It (the representation) was widespread (V5).

V5, located organisationally on the vertical plane, is connecting with local groups across the state and seeking representation from members on an advisory group. By trying to be inclusive of a range of community member perspectives, V1 is ensuring that any social policy development or reform process in which the peak body engages will be more appropriate and helpful to people from ethnic groups across the state, including those in regional and rural areas.

In summary, several key points about structuring emerged from discussion in this section. Firstly, the stories and examples demonstrate a commitment to citizen-led, or bottom-up processes for political engagement. Secondly, the aim of the practice is to also effect change systemically, and the examples have included strategies such as: developing networks at local, regional and state-wide levels; building regional infrastructure; social policy and systems advocacy. Thirdly, the practice described illustrates practitioners' ability to keep their eye on specific goals over a long period of time. They show they are analysing the environment as it changes and adapt to those changes by developing new strategies to achieve their goals.

The high theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) common to the practitioners in this section may be linked to their adaptability or action-research mindset, their perseverance

when attempting to affect long-term change and the organisational support they receive to engage in structuring processes with community members across various levels. Also, as connections with community members affected by issues are integral to the majority of the structuring processes, this suggests direct feedback to the practitioner is taking place about the effectiveness of their practice. This kind of feedback loop may not be present in processes where community members are not integral to the work. Moreover, this approach suggests that people involved in what are often lengthy processes, celebrate wins together and, because not every social change endeavour will be successful, support each other through setbacks. This level of collegiality could be satisfying for practitioners, contributing to their general perseverance despite the challenges they face.

Whether community members are integral to the structuring of community development work is the counterpoint between work discussed in this section and the work discussed in section 6.6, below. As was evident in section 6.4 (local level work only), the following category of work also shows two distinct levels of espoused practice theory and practice-in-action congruency, low and high.

6.6 Work at a local level with community members and work beyond the local level driven by practitioners.

This section discusses the work of nine practitioners, Q2, Q6, Q8, Q9, V4, V6, V10, V11 and V12, all of whom are working or attempting to work at two levels. Structuring work for these practitioners means they work at, or have connections at a local level, but they also discussed other types of work being enacted at levels beyond the local. The approaches being used when working beyond the local level include building regional infrastructure, developing regional partnerships and statewide networks, or other social policy or political party policy development and reform processes. Structuring for these practitioners means they advocate *for* groups or *on behalf of* community members, about issues directly affecting those groups or community members. Regarding network development, structuring can mean that issues for large numbers of network members can be shared and decisions taken about developing collective actions about those issues.

The theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) of practitioners in this category is mixed. Four practitioners, Q2 (Story # 8), Q8 (Story # 9), V6 and V12 (both, Story # 9) have low congruency. Five practitioners in this category, Q6 and Q9 (Story # 10), V4, V10 and V11 (all, Story #11) have high congruency. Examples of practice to illustrate various approaches for structuring community development will be discussed in this order, commencing with those with low congruency, followed by those with high congruency.

Two practitioners, Q2 and Q8, gave clear examples of regional partnerships and regional infrastructure that had been created. Creating strategic alliances and building infrastructure regionally is seen as a way to support and sustain more local community development efforts. The distinguishing feature of these approaches is that practitioners advocate *for* the views of community members in processes of regional structuring. Practitioners believe they have the ability to advocate for community members in these cases because they have direct connections with community members through other avenues of their development practice, for instance, if they also work at a local level with groups.

Story # 8 Regional Infrastructure to Support Local Work

Q2, with low theory-action congruency, discussed a formal regional partnership comprised of organisations that undertake community development work in various localities across a region. The aim of creating the regional structure was to have a greater voice on matters common to the work of four local organisations and to support these groups in their local efforts. The four organisations have created a new legal entity for their regional structure, a non-trading co-operative. The co-operative is comprised of eight members, including the senior worker and one management committee member from each of the four incorporated associations. Furthermore, each member organisation of the co-operative has maintained their individual legal status as incorporated associations. They took this decision to remain separate entities and only formally partner at a regional level because they believed this would ensure their locally-focused approach to community work would be maintained. They had previously witnessed other processes where small organisations had merged with a larger organisation and had lost freedom to be locally-responsive because of organisational-wide imperatives post-amalgamation.

When responding to the question about perceived benefits of membership in the co-operative, Q2 asked a series of rhetorical questions:

What are the projects the Co-op needs to do so that it really puts its structural stuff into effect and tests it? That's one thing it needs to do. But it needs to really grow itself into a sustainable thing in itself; and what does that look like? I don't think we're clear about that yet. And there needs to be some thinking about how will these projects both expand the capacity of each organisation to do their local work, *and*, build the capacity of the Co-op to be a regional body, which can then play in the same ball-park as the bigger organisations do (Q2, original emphasis).

Q2's questions suggest the regional partnership might be at a point where it may be worthwhile to reflect on its original aims regarding the establishment of the entity and how the structuring process is enabling the attainment of those aims, including how it is directly benefitting or not benefitting Q2's local work. Q2's comments seem to suggest that the cooperative's reflexive stance needs review. The term "reflexive" is being used here as, "an individual's self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in the process" (D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez 2007).

Q2's account suggests that members of the co-operative demonstrated reflexivity at the setting up phase when they decided *not* to amalgamate. The co-operative was attempting to maintain the member organisations' vision for local work *and* to work co-operatively at a regional level. At a time when development equates with growth, and where mergers and amalgamations are typical responses to neo-liberal forces impacting on small community-based organisations (Burkett 2011), the cooperative's stance to structure their organisation this way is unusual. This suggests the co-operative aims to be qualitatively different from other kinds of regional entities, by making structural links and also remaining responsive to disparate locality needs. At a time when competition is the dominant discourse (Kenny 2011) amongst social service organisations, this example of structuring is placing value on the discourse of cooperation, arguably, a concept at the heart of community development.

Story # 9 Regional Development Work

Whereas this example above locates structuring work *within* the social service sector, Q8's response to the question introduces concepts about making links *beyond* the social service sector. Q8, with low theory-action congruency, works for a community development organisation that has a regional focus, in a location where mining (resource extraction) is one of the main industries and where economic development dominates many regional initiatives. Q8's structuring work involves making "strategic alliances" with corporations, unions and the regional university, all with the aim of "getting community issues on the agenda" (Q8).

So, it is very easy for everything to be 'economically-driven', the basis for how we make decisions. But we'd be the voice that said, 'there's a social side to everything you're doing, every decision that gets made'. We wrote a paper, "The Social Impact of Economic Growth", and then invited people to set up a collaborative group, now called the 'Social Impacts Action Group'. We are making sure social impacts are recognised; and the work of community-based organisations is recognised and valued across the community (Q8).

Through Q2 and Q8's narratives, two approaches to partnerships have been discussed. One, where a regional entity was created, comprised of organisations with very *similar mandates* and another, where a regional entity made linkages with other established entities holding very *different mandates*. The latter has the additional aim of making explicit the needs of vulnerable community members and creating partnerships to address those needs. The distinguishing feature of both of these approaches to structuring is creating linkages and increasing the relative power of the weaker entities by banding together.

Like others in this study, V6 discussed networking and networks in relation to structuring community development work. V6, with low theory-action congruency, attends a number of sub-regional and state-wide networks as a local government community development worker. V6 spoke about concerns that, at the networks, "a lot of issues are raised" concerning V6's constituents' lives, and "it's very hard" for these issues or anything else to be acted upon. This possibly suggests that these networks do not see group action-oriented work or project work as one of their functions and, therefore, they have no mandate to act. Alternatively, as V6 believes, time to commit to these processes and lack of leadership are other factors for their inaction.

The final practitioner of those with low theory-action congruency in this section, V12, was another practitioner that talked about planning and policy infrastructure in relation to structuring work.

Practitioners need to put *their voice* into that area. I think that's where practitioners see their role to be, but, it's *too tempting* to decide, 'oh, I'll help that person today', instead of voice my opinion in this forum. I think CD work should be *about the system* quite a bit; whereas it tends to be people trying to be *helpful* in a short-term way. They can use a lot of their energy and time doing that (V12, original emphasis).

V12 perceives work at other levels, such as in policy and planning infrastructure domains, as a form of political engagement and essential to advance issues. This echoes a number of earlier comments made about the perceived possibility for greater social change when various types of work are undertaken in concert.

The participants discussed in this section, Q2, Q8, V6 and V12, demonstrated low theory-action congruency. A range of factors has contributed to their low congruency. Like Q5 discussed in section 6.4, Q2 also enacts multiple roles, both as a development worker and as a coordinator of the organisation. Additionally, Q2 undertakes this work part-time, because the full-time funded position has been split between two workers, both of whom work in distinct localities across a region. This suggests that Q2's organisation is attempting to be responsive, working in various communities across a geographic area. However, in the organisation's attempt to problem-solve the related human resource management issues, they have seemingly put Q2 under significant pressure to enact multiple roles, decreasing Q2's effectiveness.

The lack of clear mandates for action and the lack of clear links with local work seem to be a contributing factor to V6's low theory-action congruency. Compared with others in this study, V6's and Q8's relatively few years of work experience, (five years and four years respectively), could also be reasons for low congruency, particularly when considering the length of time it takes to achieve results. For V12, geographic isolation as a rural practitioner is also seen as a factor contributing to low congruency.

Several key points about structuring emerged from this discussion. Practitioners view structuring as making links between local level work and other kinds of work beyond the local to effect change systemically. This may include regional partnerships with organisations with great similarities or with organisations that are very different, but have enough in common to work together on specific projects. Networking is also a way of structuring. By having processes through which local work is supported, or where local issues can be redressed in realms beyond the local, practice could be made more effective.

Structuring Beyond the Local and Practitioners with High Theory-Agency Congruency

This section discusses the final group; those who structure beyond the local level and also have high theory-action congruency. The practice approaches in this section include engagement with peak body processes, creating federations of networks and other social policy development processes including those with a political party.

Q6, with high theory-action congruency, discussed a connection being made with a statewide peak body for grandparents. Many of the Indigenous community members with whom Q6 works are grandparents, often in situations where they are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Q6 is working with the peak body to advance policy issues with the aim of easing the financial stress some grandparents face. These processes with the peak body do not involve direct connections between the Indigenous grandparents with whom Q6 works and members of the peak body, although creating those connections had been Q6's original intention. When I asked Q6 about the merits of involving community members in peak-body work, Q6's perception was that some people associated with this particular peak body held views about Indigenous Australians that would not be helpful to establishing those relationships, indicating racist attitudes. This suggests that Q6 is seeking to advance the needs of Indigenous grandparents, but also not cause any emotional harm or disenfranchisement to the community members as a result of the structuring efforts. Q6 hopes for opportunities to involve Indigenous grandparents in this work in the future.

The final group of four practitioners, Q9, V4, V10 and V11, differ from Q6 because they talked about structuring community development as establishing networks and then joining these into a federation of networks (Gilchrist 2009).

Story # 10 Networking to Hear the Perspectives of Large Numbers of People, whilst Leading from Behind

When answering the specific question on structuring, Q9, with high theory-action congruency, told the story of a number of networks Q9 oversees as a local government team-leader. The following quote illustrates why Q9 believes these networks are important, and also flags Q9's approach to leadership.

Our job is to understand the experience of young people in a large local government area. And we can't do that. So, early on, people before me made the decision that we would have a really key role in resourcing youth interagency networks. But it's never been something *we've run*, we've always resourced it, and it's made a real difference (Q9, original emphasis).

The mechanisms inherent in the networks ensure a large number of young people's views are represented in a sizeable local government municipality. The views heard feed into subsequent policy and program-planning the council undertakes.

Q9's emphasis on "it's never been something we've run" is a significant point about the type of leadership Q9 is employing. It suggests that Q9 sees value in creating vehicles that bring youth workers together, and also the importance of not allowing the council to dominant agendas. To clarify the point about not dominating, I asked Q9 if this model of networking produces any challenges in creating or maintaining structures like these. Q9 responded:

It's interesting; it's to do enough. It's that the network has to *energise itself*. So, the challenge is to resource it without taking the lead, so that the network can function as a network (Q9, original emphasis).

Q9's strong emphasis on the individual network's ability to "energise itself" suggests that the aim for those groups, to some degree at least, is to find some internal motivating force. This type of energy strengthens and rejuvenates groups, which is particularly important for sustaining processes in the long-term. It also indicates a level of ownership by the 100

members of each of the networks with which the council is involved. Q9 is alluding to walking a fine line between *coordinating* processes, where the practitioners are at the centre of all activity, and *facilitating or enabling* processes, where the practitioners locate themselves alongside others in the group.

This example differs from the next, in that it facilitates network members to gather together physically across an area of a capital city. The next example is of a federation of networks across a state, where managing the network has meant the introduction of another layer of networking at a regional level.

Story # 11 A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level

V4, V10 and V11, all with high theory-action congruency, belong to the same state-wide network of neighbourhood centres. V4 and V10 practice as ‘networkers’ within the federation of networks, comprising 350 neighbourhood houses and learning centres across the state. V11 is also a member of this network, with two roles, as a practitioner at a locally-based centre and as a volunteer on the management committee of the neighbourhood houses peak body, (which itself is a member of the state-wide network). This sector has created a three-tiered system involving networks of individual houses in a geographic region, which are supported by one of 16 community development practitioners in ‘networker’ positions. The ‘networkers’ also network amongst themselves when connections are made with the state-wide peak body.

V10’s view is that this federation of networks can be an effective vehicle through which issues from across the state can be taken from a local level with significant community member involvement, through to policy-level domains, thereby amplifying and giving weight to matters of local concern. The following quote illustrates community member input into neighbourhood houses’ committees of management.

One of the things that characterises the neighbourhood house committees of management is perhaps *user representation*, strong user representation on the committee of management. So generally, that will mean the majority of people sitting

on the committee will have a genuine interest in the house, a direct interest, as a participant, or as a *volunteer* within that house (V10, original emphasis).

Over a ten-year period, V4 played a pivotal role in the structuring work to gain funding and establish the federation of networks of which V4, V10 and V11 are members. At V4's interview, when asked about processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of community development processes, V4 told this story of establishing the federation of networks.

Well, I'd have to say to that question, the neighbourhood houses campaign; definitely. So, when I first came into the sector in 1999, it was a \$3.2 million budget for the coordination program; it's now nearly \$21 million. So, in fact, I believe that was a strong community development practice that made a massive structural change; at the political level (V4).

V4 and others involved in the vision to establish this federation of networks have taken a long-term approach to build significant network infrastructure. They are using that infrastructure to support and sustain local community development work and other types of work, such as occasional child care services. They are using processes that involve community members to varying degrees and advocate about particular issues to benefit the tens of thousands of people across local communities each year who are members of or use neighbourhood centres.

The last practitioner is this group of three, V11, works for a local neighbourhood learning centre and is also on the management committee of the peak body of neighbourhood houses discussed above. V11 is also on the policy committee for a political party that is currently leading the federal government. I asked V11 about the significance of working both locally, at the learning centre, and the considerable voluntary effort V11 is putting in at these other levels.

I believe you have to address it at both ends. You've got to have the policies...and you have to work on where they're going, to the recipients for those (policies and practices) (V11).

The five practitioners in this latter section of section 6.6 all have high theory-action congruency. Q6 is making clear linkages between local group work and an advocacy process in a discrete area of practice, that is, issues that exist for Indigenous grandparents. Having a narrow focus such as this could be contributing to Q6's high theory-action congruency, as the size and scope of issues seems to be within Q6's capacity to influence change.

With 23 years of experience as a community development practitioner, Q9 is one of those most experienced in this study. In Q9's current middle-management role within a local government municipality, Q9 has been able to influence processes within that council, bringing the resources that come with that council to the networking process. Q9 has also spent years building up the federation of youth worker networks, and making linkages with departments across the council and within state government. The emphasis Q9 has placed on creating a community of practice, with workers in localities and their connections with vast numbers of young people, assists Q9's structuring efforts to be effective.

The Victorian network of neighbourhood houses has critical mass. With their large membership and ability to mobilise activities across levels – local, regional and state, V4, V10 and V11 have a sense of their practice being effective. They have spent over ten years with a singular purpose, to build infrastructure and gain funding to adequately resource their federation of networks, ensuring community development activities across the state are strengthened through this infrastructure.

Longevity of practice experience is the common feature of the practitioners in this section with high theory-action congruency. The least experienced had seven years and the most experienced had 34 years. They work for organisations that support their efforts to work locally themselves, or connect with those who work locally, and they are also supported to work systemically. They are all using or creating infrastructure (peak bodies and networks) to take agendas forward and to influence outcomes for their constituents.

In summary, the discussion in this section has shown that structuring community development is about working at various levels, and includes processes where the perspectives of people directly affected by issues can be heard directly or are being represented.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored how practitioners put their understanding of structure and community development into practice. Various collective approaches and processes have been discussed which practitioners believe are tools for political engagement. This engagement ensures that people's views, those not normally considered by powerful structures, can have greater political impact. The discussion has also shown that there is no single way to engage in this work; but having clear goals and an ability to analyse a changing environment and adapt to that environment seems crucial.

Eight practitioners focus on local-level work only, and 14 are working at multiple levels, either directly with community members or indirectly through worker representation and advocacy processes. More than half the sample, thirteen, is working from a bottom-up perspective with community members who drive their own community development processes. In relation to structuring beyond the local level, fourteen are working with and without community members, at levels to advocate and influence, demonstrating a structural analysis linked to their practice.

Eight practitioners demonstrated low congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice, three Queenslanders and five Victorians. For the Queenslanders, the issues contributing to their low congruency included having multiple roles and lack of experience. For the Victorians, the issues contributing to their low congruency were mainly based on issues directly related to their employing organisation or geographic isolation.

Fourteen practitioners demonstrated high congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice, seven Queenslanders and seven Victorians. Six of those Queenslanders have been trained in a specific methodology for community development practice suggesting they have clarity about how to approach this complex work. The one other Queenslanders untrained in community development methodology has considerable work experience, knows the system well, and has chosen to focus on a narrow range of community-member issues to ensure the practice is effective. Although trained in different approaches to community development, six of the seven Victorians with high congruency have had community

development training, which suggests that may be contributing to their sense of agency and efficacy.

Chapter Five discussed the organisational systems where community development practice takes place. This chapter has shown how practitioners are working horizontally and vertically within that system, and also creating webs of connections within that system. This kind of patterning within the system assists practitioners to make sense of complicated work, that aims to reduce disadvantage and involves a myriad of people across different contexts to achieve that aim.

The next chapter discusses the frameworks for practice in use, which serve as a guide for structural practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Exploring Practitioners' Frameworks of Practice for Structural Community Development

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters discussed the way practitioners analyse structure and community development, and how they put this analysis into practice when employing various methods or approaches. A key point that emerged from the findings in those chapters was that by applying a structural analysis, using a range of lenses, opportunities to influence those structures takes place through collective action. There are many forms of collective action and, oftentimes, the aim of such action is to ensure people's views, especially those marginalised within society, are considered to a greater degree by powerful structures. Further, having theory-action congruency is vital. Practitioners with high congruency can feel assured they are being effective in achieving their practice goals.

This chapter, the third and final chapter reporting the results of this study, turns to the various frameworks of practice being utilised by participants. It addresses two research questions: "What frameworks for practice emerged from the data? What aspects of a framework are more likely to increase the congruency between a practitioner's espoused theory and their theories-in-use?"

The remainder of this chapter is set out in five sections. The next section defines more fully what is meant by the concept 'a framework of practice'. The third, fourth and fifth sections present three distinct organising frameworks that emerged from the data, *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. This is followed by the sixth section, which discusses two implications for practice resulting from these organising frameworks. An argument is made that for greater effectiveness in structural practice, communities of practice be established and practitioners develop strategies to sustain themselves for the long-term nature of this work.

7.2 Defining and Using Frameworks of Practice

Frameworks of practice help a practitioner ‘frame the work’, that is, make sense of complex situations, enabling their capacity to respond constructively in their work (Lathouras 2010). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:321) argue “every community worker will conceptualise practice in a different way”. Moreover, practitioners will build an individual practice framework helping them make sense of what the work is about, and this understanding changes with experience (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:321).

Ife and Tesoriero do not discuss the extent to which practitioners actually engage in developing an explicit personal framework of practice. Rather, they outline a theoretical framework for community work, with questions for reflection to assist a practitioner to start to develop their own. This approach of writing about practice theory, proposing *a framework* for a particular type of practice and listing questions for reflection to help practitioners develop their own, is also seen in other related literature. One example is Healy (2005), who has a chapter on creating frameworks for practice in relation to social work.

Five of the twenty-two participants explicitly referred to their own personal framework of practice (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q7 and Q10). These were all Queenslanders who have studied community development at the same tertiary institution where the course entitled “Frameworking for Community Development” has been taught over many years (Westoby & Ingamells 2011)⁸. Two other participants explicitly referred to particular theoretical frameworks informing their practice, such as “a (human) rights framework” (V4), a “capacity-building framework” (V4), or a “health promotion framework” (V3). The term was also used to distinguish a “community work framework” (V4) from, for example, “a social policy framework” (V4).

The remaining participants, although not explicit about *a* personal framework that guides their practice, clearly draw on a range of factors when conceptually organising their work. The approach being taken to present this data is employing part of the process Westoby and Ingamells (2011) describe, when student-practitioners construct their framework of practice,

⁸ Westoby, P & Ingamells, A. 2011. This article discusses how “frameworking” has been taught in one postgraduate course in Queensland. However, the concept has also been a feature of other community development courses taught at the same tertiary institution.

namely by, “collecting data” and “transforming data to dimensions”. They cite Anthony Kelly, the first convenor of the postgraduate course discussed above, who argued:

Frameworks enable us (practitioners) to name important dimensions of our work and make us conscious of the way we work – providing predictable routine, safe tasks for beginning and processing the recurring dilemmas... A framework organises our thinking so that we can begin to order our action, it doesn’t order reality or make it come true (Kelly, n.d. unpublished).

The remainder of this chapter discusses the key dimensions of three practice frameworks drawn from practitioners’ data, collected through both Stage One and Stage Two processes. The three frameworks comprise various types of dimensions and these relate to: a goal or goals, a set of processes, a base of knowledge, or a combination of these dimension types. The three frameworks encompass the approaches of all the participants, however, all the participants did not relate to each of the three frameworks. I am proposing that individual practitioners draw from these frameworks to varying degrees. Similarly, the way the various frameworks together inform practice also varies from practitioner to practitioner. I also acknowledge that, as an organising mechanism, the frameworks presented here are relatively broad ways of thinking about structural community development. Individual practitioners’ personal frameworks of practice would include more nuanced dimensions, however the aim here is to name the *key* dimensions.

Three clear findings and frameworks emerged when analysing the data:

1. The first framework presented, *Structural Connecting*, is the one that all participants had in common. Similarities were found across the cohort despite the backgrounds of individual practitioners and the broad range of practice contexts. These relate to practice undertaken at the local level and relate to practice as a vehicle for social change. Specifically, the change being sought in this framework includes the ‘goals’ of *Equality* and *Empowerment*. To achieve these goals, a ‘process’ dimension relates to *Forming Developmental Relationships* and draws on a ‘knowledge’ dimension named as having a *Community Analysis*, which leads to *Collective Action*.
2. The second framework presented, *Structural Shaping*, is the one that only

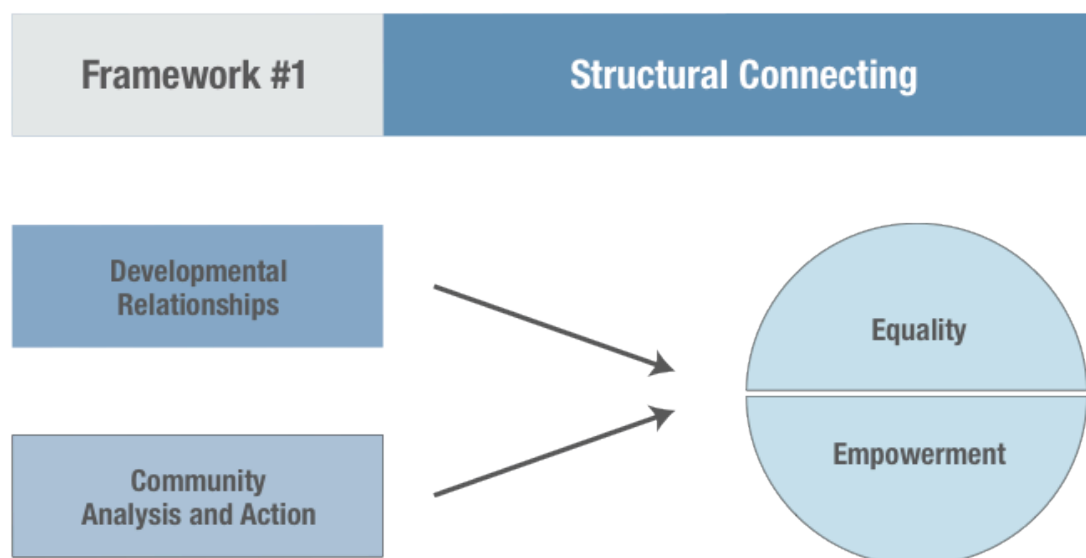
practitioners with high theory-action congruency utilised. These practitioners are seeking the ‘goal’ of *Incremental Social Change*. Theory-action congruency was created when practitioners had an understanding that structures can be acted upon or that practice shapes context. They drew from two ‘knowledge’ dimensions named as *A Nuanced Understanding of Power* and *Systems-Thinking*.

3. The third framework presented, *Structural Politicking*, signaled the greatest divergence within the group. This occurred when practice was viewed as a form of political action. Practitioners drawing from this framework are seeking the ‘goal’ of *Democratic Equality*. When drawing from the ‘knowledge’ dimension named as *Hegemony*, work takes place beyond the local level. Practitioners aim to redress disadvantage by two distinct means. These include processes involving the people who experience disadvantage themselves, through *Citizen Participation* or other processes, where practitioners engage in *Advocacy*.

7.3 Structural Connecting

When local level practice was discussed, the framework *Structural Connecting*, emerged from the data. See diagram, (Figure 8), below.

Figure 8: Framework No. 1 – Structural Connecting



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: the formation of developmental relationships and the subsequent community analysis established with members of groups creates the circumstances for commitment to collective action. The action undertaken is working towards the creation of a more egalitarian society, and/or the empowerment of people involved in processes.

7.3.1 At the Heart of Practice – Equality and Empowerment

Community development practitioners are agents of social change. Social change was discussed in two ways, in terms of creating a more egalitarian society and as processes that are empowering for participants of groups.

The distinction between these two emphases can be explained by the degree to which practitioners viewed social change processes as addressing the root causes of oppression, that is, the reason people become disadvantaged in the first instance. The latter suggests that social change goals might have longer-term commitments to action, and involve structuring beyond the local level. For example,

(It's about) *balancing an inequality* that exists, where only certain voices tend to get heard within society (V10, original emphasis).

Addressing structural disadvantage is very important. Doing that structural analysis in our work on a continuing basis to inform our work. Knowing where *we are* in that process. And I suppose how that relates to the organisations we're working in and therefore, influences our work in terms of the participants that we're meeting each day and working with, creating some sort of a change movement in their life (QM7, original emphasis).

In the second quote, QM7's emphasis on "knowing where we are" in a process suggests an acknowledgment of the complexity of the work and context when practitioners are seeking to redress inequality. It also suggests that, at any given time, locating oneself within ongoing processes is important because otherwise one could become overwhelmed by the complexity.

Social change processes couched in terms of empowerment were also commonplace in the data. This concept was discussed as applicable to individuals and to groups as they work together for a range of social change goals. The following quotes are examples of typical comments and their implicit understanding of how community development processes can be empowering.

You see the light in their eyes, you feel the fire in their belly, you see them trying things, stuffing up and dusting themselves off and having another go, and just this eruption of spirit (Q10).

When something gels, and the group starts, there's just so much possibility and potential there...suddenly what people can do, or what they're accessing or what they know. The landscape has changed in a positive way (Q1).

Both these quotes suggest community development processes can be empowering for those involved. The latter is specifically referring to a point in a group process when group members, because of their participation, become more empowered as they now have access to a range of alternatives they did not have prior to their involvement.

This discussion suggests that social change can be seen as an aim, to achieve equality, and as a series of empowering processes towards a number of different ends. However, the goals of equality and empowerment are not dimensions unique to community development; other forms of practice might also have these aims. The distinguishing feature of this form of practice, compared with other types, is the idea of *collectivity*, in which processes of collective action are empowering. Forming particular kinds of bonds, especially those providing a sense of solidarity, and establishing a collective analysis are the formative steps for collective action. These themes are discussed in the next three sub-sections.

7.3.2 Structuring for Collective Action

Oftentimes, community development is instigated when individuals present to agencies with private concerns about aspects of their lives. Workers can respond in a number of ways, and Q5's quote below, provides an example.

One of my observations over all these years is people don't know what they don't know. So when they come in, they often don't know that it's even an option to mobilise with other people around addressing a shared need. So, that's what I'm listening for, the public dimension of the private story, that is really the important part of the work, hearing that story, then seeing the potential for that story to become public action rather than a private response only (Q5).

Mobilising people into collective action is one of the normative ideas associated with community development practice. Much of the literature refers to practice as collective action or "mobilising" which, put simply, means "getting people involved in social actions" (Rubin & Rubin 2005:193). Adages such as "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts", or "many hands make light work" resonate when thinking about the benefits of people banding together to tackle common concerns. When asked about their community development work, all participants discussed these ideas of the collective nature of practice. However, this could be seen as one of the limitations of this study, the assumption that practice always involves processes that are collective in nature. The question was not asked of the participants about the degree to which collective practice occurs compared with practice remaining in private realms, those not resulting in collective action.

Collective practice considers the structural dimension of group formation processes and the ongoing dynamics within a group once formed. Yet, groups are made up of individuals and structural practice also involves forming developmental relationships with individuals, formative processes having the potential for collective action, discussed next.

7.3.3 The Structural Nature of Developmental Relationships

Forming relationships with people was another of the normative ideas of community development discussed across the data. It was raised as one of the core ideas in relation to the role or purpose of practice, yet the concept was given relatively cursory attention at interview. To a great extent, this idea was implicit, something that just happens in the normal course of events of practice. Where the concept was discussed more deeply was in relation to the practice of addressing disadvantage. For example,

I really believe that poverty is a product of the break down of relationships between people. What I believe community development does is connect people back together again. It doesn't eliminate the disadvantage but it creates a *context* in which people now have a sense of responsibility *for one another* (Q10, original emphasis).

In our neighbourhoods we've fragmented our contacts with each other. I think we need to rebuild those. We start with those small locus' of connections, relationship building, trust and opportunities of inclusion and participation. To be able to express how disadvantage is affecting them or impacting on their lives...then there can be collaboration in networks, which include those people as participants for social change (Q7).

In these examples, Q10 and Q7 see relationship building as an avenue by which people form relationships and groups, and these groups in turn, address issues that affect group members' lives. Given the implicit nature of the concept amongst participants, further examination from the literature is warranted.

Owen and Westoby (2011) theorise the structure of dialogic practice, that is, particular communication skills helpful when "bringing people together" in community development processes. They contend community development theory has overlooked the value of the critical first steps involved in forming "purposeful developmental relationships" that lay the platform for community processes (Owen & Westoby 2011). Developmental relationships, they argue, are those that involve "sustaining connection" with people through an approach to dialogue and have the dual aims of developing *mutual relationships* and also *strategic outcomes* (Owen & Westoby 2011, my emphasis). The former has no instrumental goal beyond developing a mutual connection with another person, and the latter has an instrumental focus based on practitioners achieving "developmental outcomes", those embracing a degree of "pragmatic strategy" (Owen & Westoby 2011).

The term "mutuality" is focused on the humanizing dimension of communication and relationship-making (Owen & Westoby 2011). Qualitatively, the term can be seen as one of the fundamental building blocks for collective practice. People may see the value in collective action if they have a sense that others share their common interests or concerns.

This type of relationship-making, communicate the ideas of ‘Gemeinschaft’ and ‘Gesellschaft’, a sociological theory about social groups developed by Ferdinand Tonnies (1887/2002). In the wake of the breakdown of traditional communities and the development of the modern industrial society (Ife & Tesoriero 2006), Tonnies’ Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society) refer to ways human beings interact and organise (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:18) define these as,

In a Gemeinschaft society, people interact with a relatively small number of other people, whom they know well, in many different roles, whereas in Gesellschaft society, one has interactions with many more people, but these interactions are limited to instrumental activities.

In a Gesellschaft society, we do not know most of the people with whom we have contact, as relationships are relegated to the public roles people enact in society and communication is limited to a discrete transaction associated with that role (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). If the emphasis is placed on ‘community’, where people *commune* with one another, this encourages people to interact with others as “whole people” (Ife & Tesoriero 2006:97). This creates a richer, deeper form of social interaction and enables a wider range of individual talents and abilities to emerge which will benefit others and the community as a whole (Ife & Tesoriero 2006).

The idea that people from very different spheres in society can develop mutual relationships and these may lead to collective action is salient. In an earlier work, Westoby and Owen (2009) argue the first stage of community development practice requires practitioners to be conscious of the sociality of the inter-subjective. “Sociality” is defined as a mode of conscious action within a determinable sphere of social relations (Westoby & Owen 2009). The sociality of practice is the regular, disciplined practice of particular kinds of communication and action for the purposes of developmental work (Westoby & Owen, 2009). Sociality, in Westoby and Owen’s (2009) framework, draws on Martin Buber’s (1937) philosophy of dialogue. Buber’s thesis differentiated between ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’ relationships. Of these, the I-Thou depicts the relationship between people as one of mutuality, openness, and directness (Lathouras 2010). White (2008) discusses Buber’s conception of dialogue as located within theories where there is a valorization of

communication as *communion*; where, through dialogue, a bond is formed. These conceptions of dialogue emphasise an accommodation of otherness, a commitment to ethical processes and the potential to produce profound personal and social transformations (White, 2008).

These ideas of Buber's were discussed by practitioners in relation to the micro processes of personal interaction within community development groups. For example, V1's comments below suggest a number of qualities of 'communion', those that enable transformative processes.

Or you can say *community* development...that to me, is that we get a sense of what the heck do we mean with that gift exchange, with that reciprocity, with that sharing space and time, with that form of sacrificing self-interest for common interest, which we call 'communion' (V1, original emphasis).

In addition to forming mutual connections, Owen and Westoby's (2011) emphasis on "pragmatic strategy" is the other side of the coin when forming developmental relationships. Their article uses an example of a narrative in which a practitioner's mandate for work stymies the developmental potential for collective action, when the worker privileges organisational imperatives over maintaining a mutual relationship with a community member through dialogue. A "mandate", they argue, "is an explicit contract through which an individual performs an agreed range of tasks *with*, or on behalf of, another individual or individuals" (Owen & Westoby 2011, my emphasis). Establishing and maintaining a dialogical and developmental ethos rather than a directive one, leads to motivation and hopefulness (Owen & Westoby 2011). The mandate for community development should be to seek outcomes and processes which instill a sense of hopefulness that private concerns can be addressed, and also foster motivation towards action to address those concerns. This suggests that formative steps for community development need to include these qualities associated with forming developmental relationships.

Owen and Westoby (2011) conclude their article by stating formative practices are "fraught with positional biases, tensions around mandates and institutional or systematic barriers and determine, from the outset, the extent to which a community development process will be mutually beneficial or not". This point was mirrored in the data. When asked about barriers

to transformation, typical comments were similar to these two examples.

Although government are saying that they support and believe in community development, it's a very top-down, service provision model of community development that I see happening (V4).

'Professionalisation'. Or, another way of saying that is 'a worker's agenda'. A 'worker's agenda', that comes from a 'funding source agenda' (Q9).

The concern for practice, particularly practice undertaken by those in paid capacities, is holding in tension developmental outcomes within the dominant service-delivery culture that exists in the Australian welfare state. Top-down or practitioner-led models of practice have the potential to reduce community members' ability for social change. Boyte (2008) theorises the decline of civic life when he emphasises the widespread "service economy", one which fosters "technocracy", defined as control by outside experts. Technocracy, Boyte (2008) argues, has eroded people's civic development, where the dominant service economy trains professionals to look at people's deficiencies and generates a culture of rescue (Boyte, 2008). Although there was no evidence that the experienced practitioners interviewed for this study ascribed to a rescue culture, constraints associated with their paid roles were widely discussed as problematic.

Writing from the Australian perspective, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) discuss a range of factors impacting on the Australian policy and practice context for community development. They discuss the impact of neo-liberalist and new managerialist ideologies that have a focus on predetermined outputs and outcomes, heightened accountability regimes and a risk-avoidance culture (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:19-22). These contribute to the lack of spaces for creativity about alternative approaches or thinking, and a lack of conditions and time to develop genuine and full relationships with community members (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011).

This section has described the structure of dialogic practice and issues within practice contexts that could make structural practice challenging. The next section discusses the second key structural dimension within this framework, community analysis.

7.3.4 Community Analysis

A definition of a community analysis is the phase of a process when group members, with a shared understanding of issues, make decisions about mutually beneficial actions and commit to those actions (Lathouras 2010). V12 gives an example,

Whatever the *joining* factor is, their age, their gender, their ethnicity, something about them that they feel they've got in common.... It is about them as a group, in *collective decision-making processes*, tracking their own course...community development is a way of doing that in a more *conscious* way (V12, original emphasis).

Developing a community analysis was another normative idea about community development. However, this was the phase of the work seemingly most troublesome in terms of a range of tensions and challenges. They include creating spaces in which to foster a sense of solidarity despite group configurations; and also levels of vulnerability of group members.

The conditions enabling a community analysis start with basic principles, some of which have been discussed in the sections above. The following quote provides a good summary of practice principles that contribute to the formation of a community analysis. Q10 made these comments in answer to the question, "When you think about practice principles you utilise to achieve outcomes, what comes to mind?" (Researcher)

Develop relationships that are characterised by mutuality. Create a safe space for conversations around issues that people are struggling with. Affirm people's capacity and extend their capacity. Come together to look at ways we can contribute to understand our problems and together look at ways to solve our problems. Make decisions about things that we can do together to work for personal growth and social change. Don't organise anything without energy and passion being present, so that you don't have to use rewards or sanctions for people to act because they're motivated. Then develop structures *around* people and that spirit, passion and sense of responsibility" (Q10, original emphasis).

A crucial aspect of the work is creating safe spaces so people feel they can explore issues in

non-threatening environments, before deciding what steps are necessary to get involved in community processes. This can be somewhat challenging when working with heterogeneous groups, where diversity and difference characterise groups' configurations. However, finding areas of unification leading to collective action with *any* group is necessary. This is the case with homogeneous groups also, for example, where any obvious commonalities exist because members share a common identity or come from a similar cultural background.

A further tension exists when working with groups to form a community analysis, involving challenges around the level of people's vulnerability. The following quote speaks to this issue,

I'm used to methodology where you think you *always* have to get the people affected by the issue together at all times. Which is really *not* necessarily true, and not even necessarily desirable when people are at survival levels, *real* survival levels. So if you're talking about people who have addiction and complex mental health issues and other needs, getting *that* group of people together and getting them to address their needs, it's really unrealistic. I mean, the business of meetings and advancing action and all of that, I think sometimes is asking too much of people who've already got a lot to carry (Q5, original emphasis).

If a practitioner's analysis is that collective action is sometimes asking too much of people because of their level of vulnerability, then this goes some way to explaining why community development may be abandoned in favour of other practice approaches, such as those not involving community members in a collective process of analysis and action.

However, if a framework of practice places community-led processes as central, then practitioners will ensure actions remain driven by community members ensuring achievement of a community analysis. For example, despite advances in the policy and legislative contexts, the following quote indicates an analysis that Indigenous Australians are still experiencing colonization. This means Q4 places community-led analysis and action as central to Q4's framework of practice.

They are still colonized. It sounds harsh; and people don't want to hear that. But that's the case. So you've got all that going on, there's a long history of it, and

people, in their minds and their daily lives, it still impacts from the outside world, from a whole long history. I don't believe in the *Western* development path. I don't have a set definition of what 'improvement' or 'development' is....so the way I try to work with people is *evolving* where *they* want to head to (Q4, original emphasis).

A belief in an ongoing colonizing experience for Indigenous Australians is a strong motivator for Q4's approach to practice. This approach demonstrates anti-oppressive practice, defined as an approach which highlights the "structural contexts" of communities' problems, and urges practitioners to facilitate community members' "critical consciousness of, and collective responses to, the causes of problems" they face (Healy, 2005:173). Ife and Tesoriero (2006:105) argue structures of domination and oppression have resulted in the legitimising of the 'wisdom' of dominant groups in society, while alternative wisdoms of oppressed groups go unrecognised. Community development with Indigenous people must, they argue, move away from something done *to* Indigenous people, to a practice where lessons are learned from oppressed groups (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006:106, their emphasis). Drawing on Paulo Freire's (1970) 'consciousness-raising' work, Ife and Tesoriero (2006:105) reiterate the merits of community development "from 'below' rather than from 'above'", that is, where people are assisted to articulate their own needs and own strategies to meet those needs.

This discussion has highlighted that community development done *to* any disadvantaged groups in society is problematic. Again, the current policy context in Australia provides an explanation for the predominance of this form of practice. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:86) state the current emphasis in social policy on "community capacity building" stems from ideas of social capital theory, combined with a place-based focus, and particularly targets geographic communities considered as disadvantaged. This approach, with government as initiator and regulator of programs, ideally seeks to recognise and include the role of communities in policy and programs designed to address local issues (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). However, in reality, community members are excluded from making decisions about resources or from controlling processes (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011). In essence, community capacity building uses the language of social relationships but ignores the operation of power within those relationships (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:91, citing Ingamells 2007).

In summary, this section has highlighted some of the complexity practitioners face when seeking social change. It discussed the structural dimensions of collective practice, where collective action results from a community analysis. However, practitioners hold in tension a number of often juxtaposing conditions in this phase of the work. These include ideas around the creation of actual spaces for solidarity in which community analyses are formed; the characteristics of people that make up those groups; and the levels of vulnerability of people in those groups. These can also be located within a social policy context.

The wider context also presents opportunities for achieving social change goals. The next section discusses Framework No. 2, *Structural Shaping*. It includes the idea that practitioners have, to varying degrees, a sense of agency to shape the context of practice whilst also holding onto core values informing their framework of practice.

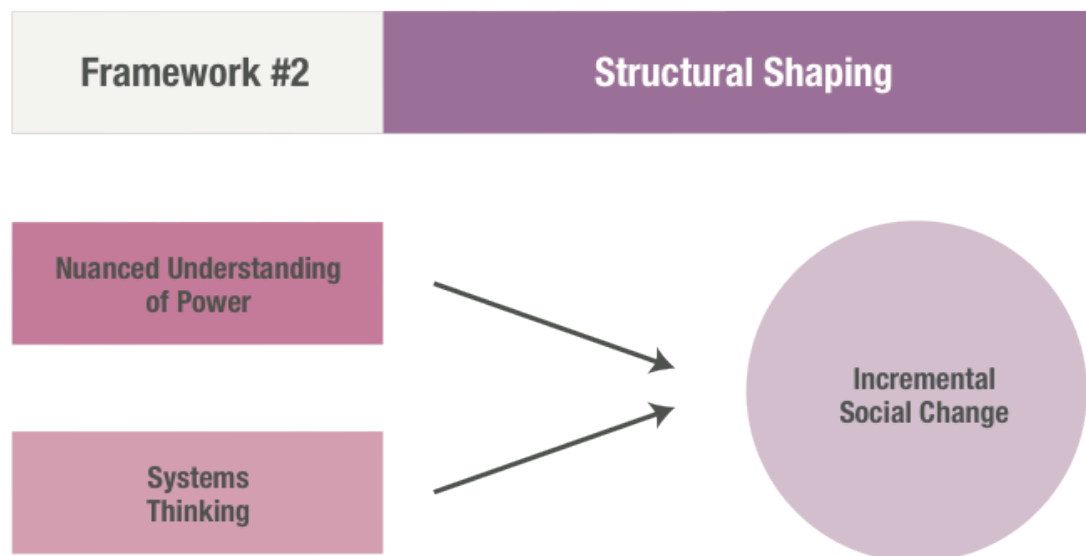
7.4 Structural Shaping

In Chapter Six (Section 6.3) it was proposed that theory-action congruency (Argyris & Schön 1974) is an important concept because greater synergy between a practitioner's espoused theories and their theories-in-use leads to more effective practice. Argyris and Schön's emphasis on adaptability in relation to changing conditions is fitting when thinking about the complex and ever-changing contexts for community development.

Four practitioners, Q7, Q10, V1 and V10, all who articulated greatest theory-action congruency in relation to this framework, were those who had an understanding that *structures can be acted upon*. Therefore, the key dimension of a framework of practice includes a practitioner's own sense of agency to effect change, despite the complexity of the system, despite organisational constraints, and despite continual exposure to stories of injustice told by community members with whom practitioners work.

Several common dimensions emerged from the data of those practitioners with high theory-action congruency. They include the 'goal' dimension of "Incremental Social Change"; and two 'knowledge base' dimensions including, "A Nuanced Understanding of Power" and "Systems-thinking". With these knowledge bases, practitioners have agency. See diagram, (Figure 9), below.

Figure 9: Framework No. 2 – Structural Shaping



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: with a nuanced understanding of power, and informed by systems-thinking, a greater sense of agency is developed. Action is focusing on a particular type of change being sought, one that is incremental.

7.4.1 A Nuanced Understanding of Power

Power was discussed in Chapter Five in terms of practitioners acknowledging that power is inherent in all kinds of contexts and social relationships. For the majority of the participants in this study, community development's *raison d'être* is analysing power and working in ways to ameliorate its negative consequences. This is achieved through empowering processes, including mobilising, strategising and influencing.

I go to a bit of a power model fairly quickly, of who makes the decisions, what sort of powers they have, how you can influence that process for a fair deal for all (Q7).

A critical stance was also discussed, one based on the idea that with power comes responsibility and the realisation that *any* network or structure has the potential to oppress,

including community development groups.

Gaventa (2006) argues that, while power analysis is important, there is no *one way* of understanding power; its meanings are diverse and often contentious. A more nuanced understanding of power might be to consider different ways of analysing power and its inter-relationships.

I practice great hope, because I believe that every structure is a construct. So everything that is constructed can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Q10).

Q10 is articulating how a re-imagining of power could be seen in a more advantageous light, referring to power to bring about desired change. Gaventa's (2006) frameworks for analysing power show power can be constituted in many ways. These more complex ways of thinking about power were used by practitioners who demonstrated the highest theory-action congruency.

For example, in the following quote, V1 is referring to "big power". Implicit in this term is the idea of 'power-over' (Gaventa 2006). Yet, when V1 refers to the "dialectical structure", there is a suggestion that V1 is also imagining power to include other forms, and spaces for forming relationships based on dialogue, referred to here as "small" power.

You get the 'big' power, but I want to complement that with the small. Power is something, which seeps into *all* the indices of our ways of living, of our ways of relating, our ways of thinking, of our ways of feeling...and so that's also powerful...using that dialectical structure is important (V1, original emphasis).

A dialectical space that re-imagines power may be a space focused more on mutual input, an exchange of ideas and a space where all points of view are considered as valid and heard. These spaces are what Gaventa (2006) refers to as "claimed spaces", spaces for participation which relatively powerless or excluded groups create for themselves.

Long-term effectiveness relies on the ability to adapt when conditions change, thereby altering both or either of one's espoused theory or theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön 1974:24). A nuanced understanding of power is a frame of reference for how practitioners can

demonstrate adaptability when conditions change. When one understands that dynamic sets of relationships exist and various forms of power are played out across those dimensions, new possibilities emerge for social change.

While analysing power along any of its dimensions of space, level and form may be useful, it is equally important to recognize that these dimensions also interact with each other, Gaventa (2006) argues. Transformative, fundamental change happens “in those rare moments” when social actors are able to work effectively across dimensions simultaneously, both in analysis terms and in strategy terms (Gaventa 2006:26). “The process of change is constantly dynamic - requiring strategies which allow for constant reflection on how power relations are changing and the agility to move across shifting spaces, levels and forms of power” (Gaventa 2006:27). Viewing practice in terms of forms of power and their interaction is one key dimension. Having agility to move across shifting spaces requires the structural dimension of systems-thinking. This was another key dimension demonstrating practitioners’ effectiveness in terms of practice shaping context.

7.4.2 Systems-Thinking

A number of stories in Chapter Six referred to collaborative and partnering work. Wheatley (2006) suggests if one sees a problem with one part of the system, one must also see the dynamics existing between that part and the whole system (Wheatley 2006). Wheatley also argues “the system is capable of solving its own problems” (2006:145). If a system is in trouble, the solutions, she states, are found from within the system and the mechanism for creating health is to connect the system to *more of itself* (Wheatley 2006:145, my emphasis). The kinds of connecting to which Wheatley refers are “critical connections” (2006:45) where, through webs of relations, participants *co-create* new realities.

This type of thinking resonates with the kinds of analyses held by the practitioners with high theory-action congruency. The following quote demonstrates how Q7 enables critical connections when Q7 takes what might be called an educative stance with people involved in processes.

We are working to always educate each other about social inclusion, and how we

inadvertently put up barriers to people's participation. Helping people see processes and why they've worked and how to invite others in. Make that very explicit, almost over do it in a way (Q7).

Q7's Story # 6, *Community Members involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work*, was told in Chapter Six. It was the very successful story of work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians working to reduce racism and break down barriers across a range of historical divides. Q7's comment about making a social inclusion agenda "very explicit" is salient. It suggests the group's analysis about participation is very important. The reference to "how we inadvertently put up barriers to people's participation" suggests that, even with the best of intentions, processes *can be* excluding or damaging to the overall goals being sought. In this case, participation is key to the group's strategy because they are seeking to educate a broad range of participants, including those who develop social policy in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, to the deleterious effects of policies on community members. Moreover, this group develops webs of relationships and, in their planning and strategising they also develop critical understandings about why things have worked. Although not discussed here, the comment suggests the group would also develop a community analysis about why processes may not work. These processes of critical analysis across a web of relations suggest how Q7 is effective in practice.

Q7 appears to be thinking about the system within which they operate as one which is connected, horizontally and vertically. Q7 claims to have created, or is opening up, spaces for dialogue across the system and, with a critical focus, is ensuring those with the least power are given a voice at the table. More significantly, however, what seems evident is the quality of the relationships across the system is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, where all participants are valued for the range of gifts, talents, skills and knowledge they bring to the table.

Wheatley's reference to "critical connections" is useful here; she is not arguing for "critical mass", but "critical connections" (2006:45). Drawing on quantum physics theory, where relationship is the key determiner for explaining all aspects of life, Wheatley argues that it is unknown how small activities within a system may affect the whole system (2006:45). "The challenge for us is to see past the innumerable fragments to the whole, stepping back far enough to appreciate how things move and change as a coherent entity" (Wheatley 2006:43).

Wheatley's emphasis on critical connections is a way the system can be affected as a whole. New realities are co-created and these are the processual aspects (Burkett 2001) of the work given priority by practitioners with high theory-action congruency.

Furthermore, of those practitioners who have the view that practice shapes context, they are holding disparate ideas together. Practitioners referred to various concepts or processes as holding them 'in tension', such as in V1's example below.

(It's) about evolving new structures; and these are practices in our relationships particularly, and even in our ways of thinking which create new structures. What I find important is that we try out new ones; we experiment and hold that tension (V1).

By holding disparate ideas in tension, practitioners are attempting not to privilege some concepts or processes over others. Kaplan (2002:24) refers to this as "seeing holistically". Rather than privileging technical-scientific knowledge (analytic knowledge), a holistic mode of consciousness is complementary to an analytic one; it is systemic thinking, or, the simultaneous perception of the whole (Kaplan 2002). The uncertainties associated with social change work were a feature of many of the interviews. However, for those with high theory-action congruency, these kinds of uncertainties seemed less problematic.

To summarise, their approach to community development work included a nuanced view of power, and processes of establishing webs of relationships and spaces for dialogue across a system. Analyses and processes like these fuel their sense of agency to shape the context of their work. The final structural dimension of practice discussed in this section relates to the goal practitioners are seeking, which is *incremental* social change.

7.4.3 Incremental Social Change

In Chapter Five, in the discussion on 'influencing powerful structures', it was shown that the majority of practitioners believed influencing powerful structures was not possible, or was unlikely. These discussions related to structures in society and associated policies which practitioners viewed as oppressive, impacting negatively on the community members with whom they work. It was suggested in that discussion that community development in these

kinds of transformative processes might not be effective.

However, in light of the analysis of systems thinking and a nuanced understanding of power, the data was examined again from the perspective of social change goals. The practitioners with high theory-action congruency held a view that the kind of social change or transformation being sought was *incremental* in nature. They are not seeking total transformation of powerful structures all at one time. Rather, they are seeking incremental social change, another key dimension of this framework for practice.

These changes are *creeping* changes; they keep their heads low (V1, original emphasis).

I understand that there is change that's doable and there is change that is less doable but....we've got runs on the board, we have affected change in certain things, in certain places, at certain times (V10).

So it's about creating social change and making it happen, and it may be two steps forward and one step back (Q7).

Another common factor for practitioners with high-theory action congruency was their length of experience. The median length was 16.5 years. One could argue the greater the length of experience a practitioner, the greater chance of them experiencing both successes and challenges associated with the work. Having had successes and achieving aims would, no doubt, provide a sense that the work is possible and the comments, such as those in the quotes above, allude to this sense of possibility.

However, having greater surety that the work is, or can be, more effective goes deeper than just having an understanding that incremental change is the outcome being sought. Rawsthorne and Howard's (2011) concerns about Australian community work practice were discussed in Chapter Three, where they argued that very little is known about what actually works. The question of effectiveness is a question thoughtful practitioners grapple with daily when using action-research like cycles of planning-acting-reflecting (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:98). However, Rawsthorne and Howard are concerned with the range of collective wisdom available to practitioners when working with communities, particularly the unique

nature of practices which vary according to the particular set of circumstances and people involved in each context (2011:102).

So far, this chapter has discussed two frameworks of structural practice. It commenced with those that include key dimensions common to all participants when practicing at the local level. A second framework of practice discussed key dimensions common to those practitioners who demonstrated high theory-action congruency.

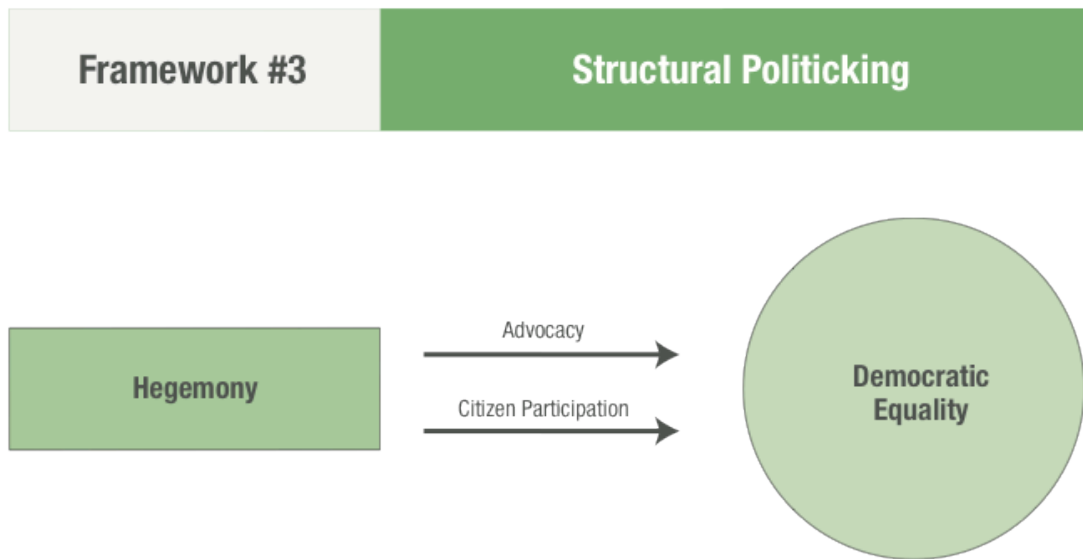
The next section discusses Framework No. 3, *Structural Politicking*. This final set of key dimensions for a framework of practice revealed the greatest difference between all the participants. They convey how structural practice is construed as a form of political action in relationship to the state.

7.5 Structural Politicking

Community development practice can be viewed as a form of political action. However, practitioners' analysis about practice being a tool for political engagement differed considerably. It spanned across the domains of no political engagement, to political engagement in two ways, as practitioner political engagement, and as citizen political engagement. This section outlines the key dimensions for a framework of practice in relation to the latter two, because of their relevance to a theory of structural community development. The word "structural" here is used to describe a form of practice engaging with the structures in society, particularly those within the apparatus of the state. 'The state' is defined as a set of organised governing institutions, formally connected to one another and advancing the common interests of its society (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:2-5).

Several common dimensions emerged from the data when considering practice as a form of political engagement. They include the 'goal' dimension of "Democratic Equality"; the 'knowledge base' dimension, "Hegemony", and two 'process' dimensions, "Influencing through Advocacy" and "Citizen Participation". See diagram, (Figure 10), below.

Figure 10: Framework No. 3 – Structural Politicking



The key dimensions relate to one another in the following ways: with an understanding of power as ‘hegemony’, political engagement occurs in two ways, either as ‘advocacy’ or as ‘citizen participation’. The outcomes practitioners are seeking from their work relate to greater democratic equality.

Democratic equality, as a concept, was raised through the lens of citizenship. The question asked at interview about citizenship was:

CD is a context where people from minority groups can have a space, and find a voice, perhaps leading to greater citizenship within our democratic system. Q: What reflections do you have about this? Examples? (Researcher)

All twenty-two practitioners answered this question readily, suggesting they relate to the concept of citizenship in their practice. For example, one response to the question goes so far as to say it is essentially the nature of the work.

I *do* really think that community work is essentially about ‘citizenship development’, but with a focus on the more marginal citizens, citizens who aren’t participating in the democratic processes; I do think that, essentially that’s the nature of the work (Q5, original emphasis).

However, the question about citizenship was asked towards the end of the interview. In only three cases was the concept raised explicitly prior to answering the direct question on the topic. This suggests that, although participants related to the concept ‘citizenship’, it may not be as central an idea to community development as others, such as poverty or disadvantage, which were discussed much more frequently. However, the idea of community development as political action within a democratic state was inherent in the data. This aspect of practice is discussed in the following section.

7.5.1. Hegemony

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of ‘hegemony’ in the 1920s to explain why workers in capitalist societies so often are not rebellious (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). Hegemony is “the way that a dominant group asserts control over other social groups” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:159), and Gramsci emphasised the subtle way in which dominant attitudes become common sense or internalised, asserting “control over knowledge and culture, affirming the dominant culture and marginalising and silencing others” (Ledwith & Springett 2010:160).

Community development groups are used to re-think dominant attitudes and silencing techniques, to give voice to the people involved. “Hegemony may be oppressive....but hegemony can also be recognised and contested by radical opposition to prevailing oppressive practices” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:303).

Practitioners who think structurally have a power analysis about hegemonic discourses and processes, and their impacts on particular groups of people.

Again, it’s that hegemony stuff that we’re confronted with the whole time; and trying to get past that. So the dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling class, and in any epoch, these are the things that we all assume that we all sign up to (V12).

When hegemonic forms of power were considered, forms of political action resulted in engagement with the state. Three distinct groups emerged, discussed below.

Firstly, there was a small group of four, for whom the state was in *the background* in relation to practice. For this group, the state is the apparatus through which social policy and its subsequent funding for community development work is obtained. These policies, developed by those funders, set the parameters for practice and, for the most part, this small group of practitioners routinely complies with these policies. Practice as a form of political engagement *was not* a feature of work for these practitioners. Social change goals have a more individual or personally transformative essence, as opposed to structural social change.

The second group of 18 places much greater emphasis on the state and on people's relationship to the state, as political actors. Compared with those in the former group, the state is much more in *the foreground* of practice. Social change goals have a more socially transformative essence, aiming for democratic equality.

Furthermore, this second group displays features that can be located within two broad groups. In the first group, political action is primarily in the purview of *the practitioner*, while in the second group, political action is primarily in the purview of *community members or citizens*. Both these groups can be considered as interested in progressive politics, that is, committed to interventions having a *reform* agenda (Aly 2010). The next two sections discuss this second group, those for whom practice is a form of political action and whose practice relates to this framework. Democratic equality, through processes of advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged groups, is discussed first, followed by democratic equality through processes of citizen participation.

7.5.2 Structural Practice through Advocacy

Pluralism, as a form of political action, is one of the classical theories of the democratic state. It stresses “the beneficial consequences of social and cultural diversity, of having many different institutions, values, groups and ways of life” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:35). It also stresses having “multiple influences within and upon policy making, and in particular the role played by diverse organised interest groups” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:33). Several examples of community development work that could be considered as ‘organised interest groups’ have been discussed previously. However, the two that have been particularly

effective in achieving goals have involved advocacy efforts through state-wide networks. Pluralist authors stress the importance of networks or ‘policy committees’, which hold power in a policy-making context (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). As a form of networked governance, that is, “the production of collective outcomes” in the context of public problems, interest groups’ input into policy-making processes can be influential (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:142).

The “deliberative democracy” literature also discusses participation in policy-making. It is an example of governments focusing on the democratic right of citizens to be directly involved in decisions that affect their lives, and takes the form of consultation processes through focus groups, deliberative polling and citizens’ juries (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007). Maddison and Denniss (2009:214) argue that, “in a democratic policy process, the determination of public policy outcomes should be seen as an ongoing process in which debate, deliberation and even dissent are constitutive elements”. To achieve political equality, it is necessary to ensure that the voices of “disadvantaged minorities” or “unpopular” groups are heard, particularly if those policies affect those peoples’ lives (Maddison & Denniss 2009:214).

The following quotes demonstrate this approach to political action. V10 and V4, who are members and leaders within a network, are attempting to influence the state about the value and role of neighbourhood houses.

What *I have* noticed is that there seems to be a greater level of conservatism, so again....it’s a politicisation, radicalisation (that is needed), effectively, of the sector. It’s getting a really clear understanding of the political process and that is that pluralist stuff (V10, original emphasis).

We took the sector from a small insignificant little blip, in the Department of Human Services that didn’t fit anywhere, and I suppose we made ourselves part of the introduction of serious social policy in Victoria....I believe that was a strong community development practice that made a massive structural change; at the political level (V4).

V4’s story was told in Chapter Six, Story # 11, *A Federation of Networks from Local Levels to a State-wide Level*. This is an example of practitioner-led political action to create

infrastructure, which then mobilised local level organisations to advocate for resources for the neighbourhood house sector. Their approach suggests an analysis; that by strengthening these networks, greater public participation and citizenship is enabled through neighbourhood centre participation. The promise of community member participation is inherent in this framework.

The aspiration of always being relevant, acknowledged and valued. As a field, as a sector, and I guess also, its ability to transform people's lives in lots of different ways, because it does do that (V4).

The other network story told in Chapter Six, # 5 *Influencing and Institutionalising Social Policy Reform*, was about a state-wide network successful in reforming a social policy by advocating for the needs of people from CALD backgrounds. This too was a practitioner-led piece of work, where people's stories were collected and used in a policy advocacy process.

So now there's been some headway with the Minister saying that each state department should provide some way for funded organisations to access interpreters, with the resources and systems for that. I mean that's been such a huge issue and there has actually been a change (Q1).

These stories were the only two clear examples given at interview about outcomes of structural change employing this type of approach to political action. This approach can be seen as a form of pluralism, one looking to influence the state by being competitive alongside other interest groups who also wish to influence the state.

As a political theory, pluralism was "shaken to the core" in the mid-twentieth Century, with political events such as the rise of "market liberalism" and "unprecedented civil unrest" (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:52). From the 1960s, groups on the political margins rejected pluralism as a form of traditional politics. At this time, civil rights and anti-war activists, radical environmentalists and feminists set the scene for several decades of radical politics and unprecedented civil unrest (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:55).

This critique from activists was also reflected in community development theory and was discussed in the literature review in Chapter Three. Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009:154) discuss how pluralism as a theory of the democratic state is faring in these contemporary times.

Pluralism today grapples with the realities of concentrated business power, corporatist partnerships, the influence of technical expertise in policy making, large and complex states and network and multi-level governance.

With all these forces playing out in the political arena, it was not surprising the majority of practitioners struggled to give an account of the transformation of powerful structures as a result of community development. V11's response about practice efficacy in this regard is a good illustration:

Very seldom; because they are bulky and heavy, cumbersome to move. They don't have the agility for transformation. They also think that because they are so big, they will be impervious to changes, more protected (V11).

This was an area about which practitioners spoke in very *aspirational* terms, seeking equality and justice by working to transform institutions and their policies causing oppression. However, this section has shown the validity of advocacy as an approach to social change. The main vehicle for this type of structural work has been networks of practitioners engaged in advocacy work and, in a small number of cases, their reform agenda has been effective.

For six other practitioners, their reform agenda includes ideas of political action through citizen participation. Two from this group work outside the social service sector, and four work within the sector. They, too, are seeking social change to bring about democratic equality, but do so through citizen participation.

7.5.3 Structural Practice through Citizen Participation

Despite global democratization in which, for the first time in history, the majority of people live in more or less liberal democracies, Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009) assert, there has been a failure to acknowledge that a deeper expression of democracy is needed. Because liberal

democracies have failed to live up to their democratic ideals, reform agendas associated with democratic renewal seek more authentic democracy (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:334). Authenticity of democracy, they argue, is “the degree to which popular control is substantive rather than symbolic, engaged by critical, reflective and competent citizens” (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:209).

Four practitioners are placing emphasis on this kind of political engagement in their approach to community development practice.

Everything we do is political. So any kind of citizen is a politician, or needs to be a politician; I believe in that. I’m not satisfied with the amount of practice of that (V11).

If you are doing structural community development, you are going to work for change at several different levels, and you are going to influence the democratic process (Q7).

Owen and Westoby (2011) argue the task of developmental work is to create an interface between “the horizontal and the vertical” processes that mobilise “household-level relationships around structural or systemic” concerns. Their emphasis on forming developmental relationships and dialogue is key to this kind of civic participation.

V10 sees the potential for this kind of dialogical practice in spaces within neighbourhoods, and particularly the neighbourhood houses with which V10 works. The following quote shows analysis about how communities could be redressing hegemony.

We *don’t* have the alternative conversations. Hegemony...‘how does that actually happen’? ‘What are the mechanisms’? So, for me, neighbourhoods are a brilliant site for those alternative conversations to occur, and where they give rise to action, so much the better (V10, original emphasis).

V10 laments the lack of “alternative conversations” about ways in which hegemonic power seeps into daily life. V10’s suggestion, “and where they give rise to action”, is the critical point to this discussion on civic participation. It begs the question about why more civic participation is not occurring. One explanation was introduced in an earlier section of this chapter, where the term “technocracy” was introduced and defined as control by outside

experts, particularly those we see in the widespread “service economy” (Boyte, 2008). The great challenge of our time, Boyte (2008) argues, is to develop a civic agency politics as an alternative to technocratic politics. This is a politics in which people are not empowered by leaders, but empower themselves when they develop skills and habits of collaborative action, and change institutions and systems, making them more supportive of civic agency (Boyte, 2008).

Boyte (2008) goes on to make a subtle, yet significant distinction between the practices of “mobilizing” and “organizing”, asserting professionals characteristically learn to ‘mobilise’; they seek to activate groups around goals and objectives they have determined in advance. This approach fails to address complex problems requiring work across lines of difference, public judgment and imaginative collective action (Boyte, 2008). The top-down emphasis of mobilising leaves governance and economic systems unchanged, (Boyte, 2008). However, the bottom-up, alternative view is one of citizenship, where people exercise their civic agency and are co-creators to solve problems and co-create public goods, things of lasting civic value (Boyte, 2008).

The clearest example of this approach to practice was discussed in Chapter Six, in Q7’s Story # 6 – *Community Members Involved in all Aspects of the Structuring Work*. This was the story of the ATSI Solidarity group where Indigenous and non-Indigenous members work against racism and to advance Indigenous culture. With a ten-year history, this group focuses on creating a space for group members to educate each other, deliberate together, and make decisions together about a range of actions they undertake each year. This group makes structural connections when building relationships with government bureaucrats, academics and others who represent diverse groups within the wider community. This is a good example of community development as civic participation. It is a community member-led approach; therefore, in Boyte’s (2008) terminology, is an example of Q7’s practice as ‘organising’, not ‘mobilising’.

As stated earlier, only three practitioners prior to being directly asked at interview raised the concept of citizenship. One of those comes from this group, Q3, who explained why citizenship is crucial for community development, and makes suggestions about the paucity of thinking around the concept.

Many of the structures and processes of democracy and citizenship have been eroded by neo liberalist drivers (for example, loss of the 'local' from local Government, the loss of support for small community organisations in favour of larger organisations). People have become more and more dislocated from relationships, organisations and democratic processes that can carry their voice.

So citizenship is about politicization. Citizenship is an automatic right or condition that is under-utilised, but community development can support people to act like the citizen they already are. To be more active citizens and therefore influence decisions that affects their lives, communities, livelihoods, workplaces and circumstances (Q3, Stage Two).

Q3 is suggesting why community members have become depoliticized. The role of a community development process is one to support citizen participation in politics. Later, reflecting on the field of community development in relation to practitioners' knowledge base, Q3 commented that this kind of political science emphasis should be fundamental to community development training as a formative knowledge base for citizenship-making practice.

This section has discussed democracy as a movement that encourages direct participation of individuals in decisions affecting their own lives (Althaus, Bridgman & Davis 2007; Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009; Maddison & Dennis 2009). Community development can be a vehicle for such participation, particularly as it pertains to reform agendas, although, the number of examples of this discussed at the interviews were few.

A final view of practice as political action was discussed by three participants at interview and is one that does not fit in with the previous continuum of practitioner-led advocacy and community member-led civic participation. This is where engagement with the state is abandoned for more alternative ways to alleviate oppression. These methods *do not aim* to change the structures of the state. These are discussed below as, working beyond the state.

7.5.4 Structural Practice Beyond the State

With a structural analysis about oppression, practitioners and the people with whom they work may engage in processes with a reform agenda. However, there were circumstances discussed where people facing an unenviable dilemma and become aware the state will not reform oppressive policies. At these times, pragmatically, a more subversive approach, using alternative ways of working is undertaken. In these instances, political action can be viewed as “claimed spaces” where people gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of institutionalised policy arenas (Gaventa 2006).

They actually evolve the alternative from the bottom-up (V1).

I hold the tension between mutuality and hierarchy. I engage with the state to a point. I stop when hierarchy displaces mutuality. Then I look to set up alternatives to those readily seen within the state apparatus where people can more freely develop the reciprocity that is essential to a healthy sense of community (Q10, Stage Two).

Stories about alternative practice were told in Chapter Six - Story # 3, *Structuring Community Development Groups into Formal Organisations* and Story # 4, *Creating a Base for Making Connections and Putting Ideas into Action*. These were from two practitioners of the group of three not working in the social service sector. One could argue these practitioners have more freedom to work in alternative ways, being located outside the apparatus of the state. However, even for others located within the social service sector, degrees of subversion were a feature of their practice. For example, Q1 told the story of a small network of education and training providers with whom Q1 works, educators who provide literacy classes. They operate within a very constrained context, where Government narrowly defines parameters for operation.

They are quite funny, at meetings they say “oh, don’t minute this”; or “this is off the record”. But their funding has been more and more restricted about who they can actually provide literacy classes to. Some providers have obviously decided to toe the line of the federal Government. (But this network) they’ve all done alternative practices. Their philosophy is that if someone needs literacy, it’s a fundamental human right (Q1).

Q1 went on to talk about the various alternative practices in which the network members engage, where ways of operating ensure community members benefit from literacy programs. In some cases, there are avenues for creativity because the complexity of the system is such that loopholes present themselves when government officials themselves cannot understand the system. These alternative practices are subversive because they originate from a values base common to the educators around equality, justice and education, and are enacted despite the funding regulations. Their desire to have open discussion that is “off the record” shows their high sense of trust with other network members, their sense of comradeship and their commitment to education for all.

In summary, this section on practice as political action has discussed a small number of social change processes practitioners use to work towards democratic equality. It has shown that structural community development is inextricably linked to politics. Even processes set up as alternative systems outside of the state apparatus, or subversively claimed within the state apparatus, seek empowerment for community members, contributing to their democratic agency.

During the second stage of the data collection process participants at both group meetings were asked to consider the critical issues that either help or hinder their attempts to engage in structural community development. To elicit this data I employed a nominal group technique where participants wrote down and discussed their top three answers. At both meetings, the need for communities of practice to be established was raised by all participants, to strengthen the knowledge base of the practice. Many other participants raised these same issues at their interviews. This, and another implication for practice is discussed in the next section.

7.6 Implications for Structural Practice

This section discusses two implications for structural practice that emerged from the data – that communities of practice be established to build the knowledge base about this form of practice, and also, the idea that practitioners need to sustain themselves through long social change processes.

7.6.1 Communities of Structural Practice

Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) argue there is an urgent need to build the knowledge base about working with communities in Australia. The practitioners in this study also raised this as an issue at the consensus conference groups. Developing a deeper understanding about contemporary practice was discussed as a hindrance for structural community development, as this knowledge development is not given enough emphasis by the field. This sentiment is exemplified by the following two quotes.

I don't think we allow ourselves the time to reflect or to actually think through the processes that we may or may not be doing. But otherwise, I don't see how people can actually move forward (VM4).

There isn't a common understanding, or a common usage of that language; something about language and analysis there (QM3, original emphasis).

Participants also discussed issues associated with the dominance of a service delivery culture for those working in the social service sector. This becomes problematic because other forms of practice dominate and there is a perception that this weakens the potential for community development. The sentiment that development practitioners are often working very differently from their non-community development colleagues was raised. For example,

I described myself before as the salmon that's swimming upstream and everyone else is going in the opposite direction (QM8).

In my team, in my workplace, I'm the only CD worker. I'm always *explaining* why I'm doing certain things (QM7, original emphasis)

The service delivery culture makes people that are working in community development articulate their work within a totally different framework and a framework that is often the *antithesis* to the method, to the work they are doing. So, it's sort of constantly undoing it. And it isolates people (QM3, Stage Two, original emphasis).

QM3 believes dominant forms of practice are the antitheses of community development. Having processes that assist practitioners to reflect on practice would contribute to their analysis about the effectiveness of their work and perhaps give greater credence to the practice type. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:119) suggest a deeper understanding of practice entails exploring a set of practices helping practitioners move from the ‘tacit’, that is, doing what just comes naturally, to the ‘explicit’, where community work demonstrates an ongoing and integrated system of personal history, knowledge, skills, experiences and values woven by community workers into all aspects of practice.

It seems crucial to establish communities of practice, where individual practitioners can reflect together on results they are getting from their work and build the collegial knowledge base of practice. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:124) discuss this as the establishment of “co-operative inquiry” groups, ways to understand practice more deeply and develop a collective analysis about trends and issues, and effective ways of responding to those.

This, however, raises two other issues. Firstly, the small cohort of community development practitioners in Australia, a relative minority compared to other fields of practice in the social service sector. Secondly, the large geographic areas in which practitioners are located across regions. Both these realities make it difficult for practitioners to connect with others doing similar work.

Familiar with these realities for Australian practitioners, Rawsthorne and Howard (2011) discuss contemporary opportunities for practitioner connection through the use of social networking and other on-line tools. Combining the functionality of on-line tools with semi-formal and formal processes of co-operative enquiry seems to be the best combination of strategies to achieve better practice. The structural nature of practice, described as engaging at societal levels beyond the local, seems to warrant networks of peer analysis beyond just those found in localised geographical contexts.

Two of the factors that contributed to practitioners’ high theory-action congruency are described here. Firstly, the extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work resulting in reasonable expectations about outcomes. Secondly, having an action-research mindset, which allows practitioners to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development. This suggests, therefore, that the

establishment of communities of practice would contribute to greater effectiveness for structural community development practitioners. They could serve as sites for collective knowledge generation and ways in which practitioners could gain support for their work.

Another issue raised by participants relates to the ability for practitioners to sustain themselves throughout the long-term nature of social change work. This is discussed in the next sub-section.

7.6.2 Sustaining Self for Structural Practice

Three ideas emerged from the data relating to practitioners sustaining themselves. Firstly, the idea that the work is long-term was raised. For example,

I don't think seven years is long enough with Indigenous people because their history is too long. I don't have too many good news stories to tell there because I think we're looking at probably another *100* years (to make a difference) (Q6, original emphasis).

Secondly, the ideas that, through day-to-day interactions with people, a great number of issues are presented, and it is not possible to work on them all. Q7's example below, demonstrates strategic thinking about what issues will be acted upon. Q7 understands that influencing change is a lengthy process and Q7 would rather be effective in *some* areas, compared with being less effective in *more* areas. For example,

There's never a shortage (of issues) to engage in. I am trying to not pick up too many project opportunities because your work becomes more diluted and you're less likely to develop a thought-through action around how you can influence change (Q7).

Thirdly, the idea was raised that this work can be personally challenging or taxing because of its activist nature and reform agenda. For example,

You can't expect a nice, gracious, gentle occupation in community development. You're a front-line soldier (V11).

The way we were taught community development, it was very much an activist model, and I really tried to follow it very sincerely, but I think fighting so much can make you quite ill. I've come to realise now if you want to be in this field you have to *first* look after yourself, and then, try to do whatever you can, and just be happy for whatever small changes you can make (V5, original emphasis).

All of these ideas, the long-term nature of the work, not taking on too many issues for action, and knowing the extent to which activism can be personally challenging, speak to the idea of sustaining self for structural community development work.

Another factor for high theory-action congruency is practitioners' perseverance through lengthy processes. Many spoke of the rewarding nature of this work, when processes of empowerment enable participants to achieve things in their lives they could not have achieved before their involvement in community development processes. These stories, though, were matched with many other stories in which work involved struggle and challenge. Despite this, the long-term commitment to community development as a form of social change was evident amongst the cohort in this study.

Sustaining oneself for the 'long haul' is an area given limited consideration in the community development literature. Ife and Tesoriero (2006) argue long-term commitments to the work are acknowledged as necessary because social change is not something achieved quickly. This longevity can be threatened by the stresses associated with practice (Kenny 2011), requiring strategies to manage stress; or, as Shields puts it, ways in which practitioners can keep "sparkling without incinerating" (1991:119).

A helpful perspective may be to view practice more as an unfolding journey. Kaplan (1996) emphasised development practice as a living process, or an art, one demanding imagination, flexibility and the ability to work with ambiguity and contradiction. To come close to the essence of the concept of development requires a journey of exploration, Kaplan (1996) argued. In a later work, he wrote,

As development practitioners, we must plunge ourselves into the ongoing story of the social organism as it is being lived, make sense of it as it unfolds, and build within

ourselves sufficient depth of resource that we may be prepared to offer an appropriate and responsive intervention when necessary. Rather than rigid planning and the assembling of tools and techniques, what is required of the competent social practitioner is rigorous preparation, and the building of surplus inner resources (Kaplan 2002: 160-161).

Kaplan (1996) argued that, to understand development one needs to acknowledge that development is a life process, never static or complete. This idea gives credence to the thinking of practitioners, discussed earlier, about viewing social change as incremental; it is unfolding or ongoing. Inner resources to sustain oneself in an ongoing manner can be developed through the processes of the work themselves. As the exploratory journey of practice unfolds, it is strengthened by the quality of the relationships developed with community members and colleagues alike.

When responding to the final question asked at interview about the most exciting aspect of this work, Q3 talked about practice as a creative act. These acts include ongoing processes where, in relationship with community members, practice can be nourishing.

It's always about creativity. It's so nourishing, it's such a buzz when people you work with can be more of themselves in the world. Community development is about creating opportunities for the true expression of nature; and that's where all the power is connected to, and why there's so much power in people's dreams and visions; the human potential (Q3).

Ife and Tesoriero (2006) state that both personal and activist networks can support practitioners' long-term commitment to the work. Kenny concurs (2011:419), and places emphasis on peer networks when she advises a practitioner to "apply community development principles to yourself". Forms of collegial support and co-mentoring are sustaining and nourishing as comradeship is developed. Two other practitioners mirrored this sentiment,

What's critical is 'a base', somewhere that I can stand with colleagues who think similarly (QM9).

It's wonderful when I have fellow traveler, or two or ten. It warms my heart to have fellow travelers. When I see the field greening, germinating (V11).

This section has shown that practice requires long-term commitment to effect change. It has been suggested that viewing development work as a process that unfolds, or a journey to be explored, is a helpful way to think about practice. This thinking is likely to open up a myriad of opportunities for creative action. Practitioners, no doubt, develop a range of strategies to sustain themselves for lengthy periods, and those that have been highlighted include collective processes, where practitioners apply the principles of community development to themselves. This concerns relationships that are reciprocal and collegial in nature, providing a source of strength for practitioners and comradeship with others, as they engage in long-term social change endeavours.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored practitioners' frameworks of practice for structural community development. The three frameworks presented have distilled a number of key structural dimensions and collectively, they paint a complex picture of practice. These complexities exist on many fronts and include various analyses informing practice, shifting contexts for practice, and multiple stakeholder involvement in processes.

The chapter has shown there is no *one* approach for structural community development. Options for social change processes are open to imaginative and creative processes, emanating from the collective wisdom of those involved. However, some helpful and hopeful analysis contributing to greater practitioner agency was made in relation to the three frameworks presented. The framework *Structural Connecting* emphasised equality and empowerment as the kinds of social change being sought through practice. The framework *Structural Shaping*, showed experienced practitioners with a nuanced understanding of power are seeking incremental social change and have the highest theory-action congruency. The framework *Structural Politicking* illustrated community development as having an inextricable link to politics and is seeking democratic equality.

A critical reading of the individual frameworks presented showed social change outcomes

could benefit from greater emphasis being placed on some key dimensions over others, and also emphasised the inclusion of additional key dimensions once the frameworks were examined through theoretical perspectives in literature. Two implications for such practice were discussed, emphasising the importance of establishing communities of practice, and that practitioners need to sustain themselves for the long haul of structural practice.

The aim of this research is to provide a useful theory of structural community development for contemporary contexts. The discussion in Chapter Eight seeks to draw key lessons from the three findings chapters and also various concepts and themes found in various bodies of literature to enable the development of such a theory.

CHAPTER EIGHT - Discussion and Conclusion: Towards a Useful Theory of Structural Community Development

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion based on all the previous findings chapters and addresses the final research question: “What are the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?” In Chapter One, the Introduction, it was argued that there was a need for theorising “from below”. This Discussion and Conclusion chapter is the result of such theorising. In light of the findings, three main ideas are distilled: that structural community development is a multi-faceted theory; that a combination of frameworks signpost a particular model for structural community development; and if practice was to integrate these frameworks, this should have a bearing on practitioner theory-action congruency, and therefore the effectiveness of practice.

This research project employed an iterative approach (Blaikie 2010), whereby theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process (Mason 2002). A reflexive-dialectical perspective on practice attempts to find a place for the individual and the social, the objective and the subjective, within a broader framework of historical, social, and discursive construction and deconstruction (Kemmis & McTaggart 2000). The twenty-two experienced practitioners involved in this study have offered signposts that are both helpful and hopeful about the possibilities for the transformative possibilities of community development, particularly as they relate to those who experience forms of oppression.

However, certain limitations and restrictions are inherent within all social research, including those relevant to this study, and because of these circumstances, the next section provides a critique of this research project. Keeping in mind the limitations discussed below, this research has made a contribution to furthering the knowledge base of community development, and this contribution is also discussed. Following this, the subsequent three

sections draw together knowledge from the study, which have been illuminated by theoretical concepts found in various bodies of literature. This chapter brings to fruition the framework of knowledge generation introduced in Chapter Four from Mikkelsen (2005), where knowledge can be viewed from empirical, constructionist and normative frames of reference. This chapter proposes a theory of structural community development, a normative model for practice, and its practical implications, reflecting practice in contemporary contexts. The chapter concludes with implications for further research and community development education as a result of this study.

8.2 A Critique of the Research Project

Limitations and delimitations specific to the research design and methods were discussed in Chapter Four, the Methodology chapter. There are three general limitations relevant to this study.

Firstly, this research has been exploratory in nature (Neuman 2011), seeking to search for meanings about a subject matter, structure, which is conceptually challenging due to its very omnipresence. A methodology seeking depth about a ubiquitous concept, at the expense of breadth, was utilised. While the findings from this research are not generalisable (Darlington & Scott 2002:17), they have aided the theory-building aim of this project.

Secondly, it needs to be acknowledged that there is an array of perspectives about community development's purpose, processes and outcomes. This orientation to community development, around structural dimensions of practice, will not have universal recognition. It has been my hope, however, that this perspective of community development will make a contribution to the literature and the field, one that is robust and can stand alongside other interpretations about practice.

Thirdly, research studies grow out of a particular time and place (Darlington & Scott 2002). The length of time taken from commencement to examination of a doctoral thesis, and the time for subsequent publications from that work to emerge, could span a number of years. Therefore, the perspectives of practitioners reported in this thesis reflected their perspectives made at the time. Further, the context of a fast-paced and evolving society means that the

conditions for practice expressed at the time of the data collection may be less applicable at the current time. However, the process of revisiting the literature towards the end of the research project to examine the most current writing in the field, particularly for the Australian context, indicated that conditions in practice contexts are similar to those when I commenced.

Therefore, although the findings from this study are not generalisable, they are transferable (Marshall & Rossman 2011). This means that the methods could be replicated in other practice theory-building contexts. The rigour employed throughout the study's various processes confirms a high degree of trustworthiness and authenticity and, therefore, credibility (Patton 2002) about the results.

With the challenges and limitations discussed here and those relating to the research design discussed in the methodology chapter in mind, the remainder of this chapter discusses the research results in light of the literature, and as they relate to the aims of the research project. Structural community development is discussed in the following two sections as a multi-faceted theory and a normative model comprising three frameworks. The theory and model are a contribution to the knowledge base of community development because they have made sense of a highly elaborated concept, 'structure' (Lefebvre 2002), as it relates to practice. This study set out to explore how community development is redressing structural disadvantage, or how it can live up to its emancipatory potential, a proposition often made in the literature. It provides clarity about a diversity of structural concepts practitioners make meaning of, particularly as they face complex issues in contemporary contexts for practice.

8.3 Structural Community Development - a Multi-faceted Theory

The conceptual framework was outlined at the end of Chapter Three. This framework reflected the theoretical orientation at the commencement of this study and continues to be a helpful lens through which a theory of structural community development can be viewed. Based on analysis of the findings, it is apparent that a single understanding of structure cannot be made. Three distillations of structure contribute to a multi-faceted theory.

1. Structure can be thought about in relation to concepts of the *structural*, that is, the analysis practitioners have about *the diverse meanings of structure*.

2. Structure can be thought about in relation to *the act of structuring*, that is, the purposeful action undertaken, particularly as it relates to forming a base from which action is structured beyond the local level.

3. Structure can be thought about in relation to *the structured*, that is, the type of structures developed and maintained to hold community development work whilst it is in process.

These features are discussed in turn in the following three sub-sections.

8.3.1 The Structural - Diverse Meanings of Structure

A multi-faceted theory of structural community development includes the concept of *the structural*. Three sets of theoretical explanations can be used to illuminate this perspective. They include the following ideas: that the structural *bridges both objective and subjective meanings of structure*; that it draws on *modernist and postmodernist* theorising; and that its point of reference is *critical theory* and, within that theory, the philosophical tradition of *pragmatism* is drawn upon.

Taken as a metaphor, structure has diverse meanings. In Chapter Five, it was suggested that, when practitioners think of the concept of structure as a noun, systems of organisational and political structures were discussed as tangible objects. In the macro-sociological sense, this kind of thinking has synergies with structuralism, which emphasises macro structures in society and how these have primacy over the individual (Giddens 2009). However, the limits to this theory are exposed when one considers its deterministic nature (Bottero 2010), a stance challenged by the diversity within one's life, the many roles one plays in society and the multiple identities to which one may ascribe.

Chapter Five also showed how practitioners view structure from a symbolic interactionist stance, where concepts are perceived through subjective meaning-making and social interaction (Anderson & Taylor 2002). For example, when discussing behaviour associated

with community development processes, their analysis showed that practitioners viewed structure as collective meaning-making and agency. That is, by describing behaviour and processes as verbs, their analysis suggested their belief that structures can be acted upon. Therefore, this hopeful interpretation of practitioners' understanding of structure indicates that, despite any objective realities which may cause particular oppressive conditions for people who interact with structures, subjective realities can be utilised through community development to restructure those conditions.

These analyses also indicated that practitioners were implicitly drawing on what Burkett (2001) has previously discussed as both modernist and postmodernist viewpoints of community development. Burkett (2001) argued modernist interpretations of community and community practice are based on notions of fixity, objectivity and universalism, with fixed characteristics and spaces, objective structures and universalised ideals. However, postmodern interpretations of community development consider the processual and relational aspects of engaging with complexity in a more dynamic way (Burkett 2001). Practitioners undertake processes of *restructuring* by developing relationships with a range of people across systems, to effect change where and when it is possible.

These postmodern ideas are particularly pertinent, given the complexity of practice in contemporary contexts. Practitioners revealed a sophisticated understanding of community, one that attempts to harness the ideas found in Tonnies' (1887/2002) theory of *Gemeinschaft*, that is, types of bounded communities where people *commune* with each other, creating rich and deep forms of relationships to benefit the whole community (Ife & Tesoriero 2006). However, the practitioner analysis did not uncritically draw upon "nostalgic" visions of community from times gone by, nor those which "occlude difference, diversity and conflict" (Burkett 1998:346). Practitioners acknowledged the changing face of community in a world where new technological and other opportunities are emerging, all of which can be used in imaginative ways to develop a range of *communities*. New opportunities include embracing ideas of heterogeneous community; and these kinds of *re-visioning*, Burkett (2001) argued, can be seen as sites of *resistance* in the face of deleterious conditions of globalisation. Such postmodern theories, with an emphasis on dialectical thinking (Shaw & Martin 2000) and ideas of heterogeneity, identity and difference, provide new theoretical perspectives for structural community development.

Practitioners held a very hopeful analysis about how structures are both made and makeable through *structuration* (Joas & Knöble 2009:289, their emphasis). This analysis served as an antidote to practitioners' perceptions about structures being oppressive because of particular restrictive or oppressive policies they hold. Invoking Giddens' structuration theory harks back to what Joas and Knöble (2009:297) call Giddens' "anti-functionalist" stance, a stance that acknowledges that systems in society exist, yet power lies with actors and their ability to effect social change. Power, as a metaphor for structure, was explicitly discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4). At Stage Two of this research, a consensus was reached amongst the Queensland practitioners that a structural analysis of disadvantage necessarily comes first in processes of community development. This analysis positions them in their choice of work, the relationships they make and foster, and decisions they make about how to structure their work. Further, it was argued that a structural analysis is one that analyses power through a matrix of lenses. The Stage Two processes illustrated how practitioners examine the complex ways in which power exists in society. They analyse the conditions of their constituents' lives, both at the micro-level of daily life, and at the macro-level, where the political and societal milieu create the conditions of daily life.

When practitioners talked about unmasking power (Brookfield 2005) and making micro-level and macro-level connections, this can be considered an exercise in pragmatism. This concept was introduced in Chapter Five when discussing the Queensland Stage Two consensus conference group. Those practitioners agreed that a power analysis is fundamental to practice, and this analysis orients them to the kinds of social issues on which they choose to work. However, they also make judgments about what opportunities and constraints for action surround those social issues, and make pragmatic decisions about how to proceed in light of their judgments.

Goodman (1995) discusses the origins of the philosophical tradition of pragmatism and quotes William James (1975:259), who articulated pragmatism as the process of considering,

What effects of a conceivable practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare.

Pragmatism, from this perspective, stresses *results*, not origins. It emphasises the humanistic principle that ideas cannot be separated from the human contribution of organisation, interest

and selection (Goodwin 1995). In this pragmatist sense, community development processes are about people creating the kind of society in which they wish to live, and pragmatically seeking workable steps towards achieving this society. Chapter Five (Section 5.4.5) discussed data gained at Stage Two about how practitioners make pragmatic decisions in relation to the usefulness and workability of possible community development responses to situations. They weigh up opportunities and constraints in given situations and make judgments about what can be achieved.

As well as an emphasis on results, structural community development also considers the *origins* of processes, particularly those instigated because of a practitioner's structural analysis. In this context, the concept of pragmatism can be linked to critical theory in the data. Brookfield discusses four traditions of criticality, one of which is "pragmatist constructivism" (2005:15). Brookfield (2005) argues that pragmatism emphasises the importance of continuous experimentation to bring about better social forms. This kind of experimentation was seen in the data when practitioners referred to taking an action-research approach to their work. The stories told about the creation of new types of structures to achieve goals demonstrated they were not following prescribed steps. They had a mindset of experimentation, exploring a range of options and evaluating processes as they went along.

A pragmatic slant on critical theory also argues for "a defensible flexibility" (Brookfield 2005:17) regarding ways that critical values might be realised and encouraging a self-critical, and self-referential stance whilst affirming the creation of democratic forms of life. Brookfield cites Cornel West (1999), liberation theologian, philosopher, political commentator and neo-pragmatist (Cowan 2003; Goodman 1995), who understands pragmatism as a political form of cultural criticism and locates politics in the everyday experience of ordinary people (West 1999:151).

The emancipatory social experimentation that sits at the centre of prophetic pragmatist politics closely resembles the radical democratic elements of Marxist theory, yet its flexibility shuns any dogmatic, a priori or monistic pronouncements (West 1999:151-152).

West's view of pragmatism is to ensure the certitudes of critical theory never become reified or placed beyond healthy criticism and also, that people can:

Relate ideas to action by means of creating, constituting or consolidating constituencies for moral aims and political purposes (West 1999:146, cited in Brookfield 2005:18).

Brookfield (2005:31) argues that people using these processes need to recognise when an embrace of alternative views is actually supporting the status quo it appears to be challenging. This kind of critical examination and non-reification was evident in the data when power and structures in society were discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.4.1). Community development groups were acknowledged as possible micro-level sites in which oppression can occur. This is because they are situated within the broader global-political economy and, therefore, are impacted upon by factors resulting from such macro processes. The discussion on power and structures in society emphasised the importance of community development processes continually examining the power dynamics within groups and within structures created through community development, to ensure they do not inadvertently adopt oppressive practices. Therefore, the structural component of community development has links with critical theory. Group work processes enable critical thinking to generate a specific vision of the world as it *could* be while, at the same time, guarding against the adoption of oppressive practices to achieve those ends.

The practical and pragmatic elements of community development directly relate to the second feature of a multi-faceted theory – the act of structuring community development.

8.3.2 The Act of Structuring

A multi-faceted theory of structural community development includes the concept of *structuring*. Three elements from the findings relate to this area, including the idea that structuring is about *sustaining processes*; to be effective, the *locus of control for project decisions* needs to remain as close as possible to the people involved in the work; and that practice structures *beyond the local*.

As part of a theory of structural community development, the term is being used in a particular way whereby, with specific goals in mind, practitioners structure their work in

purposeful ways to achieve those goals. This involves making decisions about the work, such as particular people or organisations with whom to form relationships; the type of entity that is created or used to move the work forward; and processes to evaluate the effectiveness of this work as it is progressing.

In the first instance, with a structural analysis about power, practitioners seek to redress deleterious effects of oppression experienced by particular groups in society. Subsequently, structuring involves responding to those effects of oppression and developing and sustaining processes over time. This analysis comes about because of the nature and severity of issues faced by communities and the extended periods of time required to respond to these issues.

An example of this was discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.6), where a story was told of poor race relations between students in a high school, resulting in a high degree of conflict, violence, absenteeism and exclusions. The overall goal of the project was to reduce the inter-cultural conflict, in the hope that young people would get a better education and have every opportunity to advance their lives. The community development approach used an arts-based process to work with the young people and, over a two-year period, the school recorded a marked reduction in conflict, suspensions and exclusions. Furthermore, by employing an action-research methodology, the project was evaluated as it progressed, informing the various phases of the project and, therefore, making it more effective. The resulting analysis also included the need to continue to resource the project in order to further embed processes across the whole school setting, which would further consolidate the project's effectiveness. This type of structuring shows a shift in mode, from that of simply an action-research project to a more sustainable change, in which new processes were institutionalised in the everyday functioning of the school.

Further analysis about the effectiveness of this work relates to the locus of control to make project decisions, another element relevant to the act of structuring. In this case, although the project was resourced by government entities, the location of power and control over decisions was located with the people directly involved in the community development project group, but this is not always the case.

There is a 'top-down' / 'bottom-up' tension that exists when community development processes are funded by government. This was discussed as potentially problematic

throughout the interviews. Practitioners talked about priorities set by their employing organisations and priorities set by funding bodies who resource those organisations, and the subsequent tension this creates with workers who seek freedom to be responsive to community need as it arises. With funding contracts come set priorities and outcomes to be achieved by those in receipt of funding. In the high school example, it was shown that the practitioner telling the story was an employee of the main funder and thus had a significant degree of influence over funding. The practitioner, therefore, was able to ensure funding flexibility to take the project into whatever areas would increase its potential for effectiveness.

The story told of the Victorian federation of networks, discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.5), highlighted that significant funding had been obtained over a ten-year period to support the work of local neighbourhood houses across the state. Their aim is to ensure that, by resourcing local centres, community members will have local infrastructure to support local activities. They are attempting to hold in tension both the top down and bottom up dimensions of this work. That is, they are navigating the “structural dilemma” (Pearce 2010), both to receive funding from government and, with an analysis of power, create processes that allow just change to occur across communities.

The final structural component within a multi-faceted theory harks back to the sociological concept of making micro-macro connections and, in relation to structural community development, this involves structuring beyond the local. In Chapter Six, it was shown that 14 practitioners extended their practice beyond the local level. This approach to structuring is explicitly linked to their structural analysis about oppression and societal structures, hence the location of this work attempting to remedy forces of oppression at their source. Chapter Six also showed that if a practitioner’s framework of practice included community members as integral to all aspects of the structural practice, the degree to which work is ‘community-member led’ or ‘practitioner-led’ becomes a factor. A relatively low number of practitioners engaged in structural practice through citizen participation, six, in total, with only four of those working within the social service sector.

This aspect of practice, that is, making micro-macro connections, is one found in the literature, however, it is one that was seemingly problematic for practitioners when considering community members’ leadership or involvement in such processes. Practitioners

provided several explanations for this set of circumstances including, as discussed above, the centrality or peripheral location of citizens in *all aspects* of community development as part of a practitioner's framework of practice. Another explanation, exemplified by the Victorian neighbourhood houses network story discussed above, relates to the degree to which practitioners saw the building of infrastructure to enable bottom-up processes to occur as a necessary pre-condition for community development. Chapter Five (Section 7.3.4) discussed complications with assisting community members to form a community analysis and subsequent action. These were linked to levels of community member vulnerability, and the risk that community development processes could overburden people. A further explanation of why structuring beyond the local can be seen as problematic was discussed in Chapter Seven, in the section on citizen participation (Section 7.5.3). That discussion raised concerns about the way in which contemporary society tends to depoliticise citizens, reducing community members' analysis about structural factors that result in their own disadvantage.

Examples in the literature support these findings providing explanations for the lack of micro-macro structuring. Owen and Westoby (2011) emphasised practitioner skills and methods for structuring work, particularly micro-skills that form the basis for other work that connects "household-level relationships around structural concerns". Boyte (2008) emphasised the subtle difference between 'mobilising' and 'organising', where professionals characteristically seek to activate groups around goals and objectives that have been determined in advance. This speaks to 'top-down' ways of practicing, and also raises ideas about motivation and how people organise themselves in projects for which they see a need. Rawsthorne and Howard (2011:19-22) provided further explanations regarding the impact of neo-liberalist and new managerialist ideologies on practitioners in funded social service contexts. Funded services, they argue, not only have a focus on pre-determined outputs and outcomes, but also generate a risk-avoidance culture that contributes to the lack of spaces for creativity and relationship-building endeavours with community members (Rawsthorne & Howard 2011:19-22).

To summarise this sub-section, a multi-faceted theory of structural community development involves the act of structuring practice. Structuring includes the importance of sustaining processes over time, particularly around entrenched problems in communities. Structuring also includes holding in tension top-down and bottom-up drivers for the work, that is, where the locus of control for decision-making rests and how locating decision-making power as

close as possible to community activity should ensure its greater effectiveness. Finally, structuring work beyond the local level is another element. With an analysis of oppression, structural community development needs to be working to remedy such oppression at its source. It has been argued that these three structural dimensions together are required to effect change.

Ways to hold processes over time, or *the structured*, becomes another feature of the proposed theory and this is discussed in the next sub-section.

8.3.3 The Structured – Ways to Hold Processes Over Time

The final feature of a multi-faceted theory of structural community development involves the *structured*, that is, the type of structures developed and maintained to hold community development work as it proceeds. After public issues are identified and processes of relationship development begin, structures or entities are usually created or used to move the work forward. These structures provide a solid base from which community members and practitioners act.

Two main features of ways to hold processes over time emerged from stories told by practitioners. These relate to the processes of *creating solidarity with members* as a base for action, and processes of *making structural links with others* outside this group to build new relationships of solidarity.

Practitioners discussed, to a great degree, the first of these features, that is, creating solidarity with members. They often referred to processes of building trusting relationships through the creation of safe spaces, which provide a sense of mutuality for those involved. The feature ‘mutuality’ is significant because it encompasses the idea of reciprocity, the idea that people in the group share responsibility for the group’s development and action.

These processes would seem to be an antidote to what Boyte (2008) refers to as “technocracy”, discussed in Chapter Seven, in which professionals, when linked to a “service economy”, impede people’s civic development. This emphasis on safe spaces also reflects practitioners’ analysis of power. Practitioners told many stories of work where community

members' sense of identity was negatively shaped by processes of discrimination and labeling because of particular personal features they had or because of their particular life circumstances. The safe spaces that practitioners create reduce the effects of isolation and stigma resulting from such discrimination. These can be seen as processes of working with people to re-construct their identity in light of the group's collective analysis on these matters.

Stories told in Chapter Seven also showed practitioners supported processes of solidarity-building by placing emphasis on the creation of dialectical structures. Dialectical processes are those where multiple ideas are held in tension, where multiple forms of power are discussed and examined and yet, at the same time, members' *collective* analysis about responses to these processes is put into action. This is what Ledwith (2011) claims is community development's purpose, to tread the fine line between embracing respect for difference and, at the same time, creating a common vision, one that has an emancipatory agenda.

The second, and related, feature to solidarity-building considers ideas of building relationships with others outside of community development groups. The data suggests that, while commitment to particular actions are underway, groups also create multiple pathways *into* the group or build new connections with the group. One of the stories told in Chapter Six, Story #6 about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Solidarity group, discussed both *task-oriented* features (to undertake particular actions) and *relationship-building* features through a myriad of consciousness-raising activities. This group purposively made links with people, organisations and governments, thus building momentum for the achievement of their goals. This group showed they were looking for enough synergies between existing actors and new or potential actors to create solidarity.

These relationship-building processes with people also draw on the idea of the dialectical. With heterogeneous groups, new ways of thinking are enabled because of the new relationships made. There would be no doubt that these provide both opportunities for growth and renewal, but also challenges because of the very difference that exists amongst actors. This kind of difference was highlighted with the story told in Chapter Six, Story #9, by the practitioner doing regional work in a mining area. That story provided an example where relationships were being continually built with others who, at the outset, seemed to

hold very different values from those of the members of the community development group. In this case, the emphasis was on an educative stance with people involved in the mining industry, whose primary motivations seemed to be economically driven. This work resulted in the consideration of social factors and impacts of this industry on local communities, and actions were developed to alleviate these impacts.

Participants discussed a range of different types of structures, from informal groups, formal organisations and networks. A number of salient warnings were made about their creation, including the importance of weighing up the risks associated with the act of progressing to greater degrees of formality. A concern noted was to ensure responsibilities associated with legal requirements for formal organisations do not overtake other actions, for example, those that were the motivation for collective action in the first instance.

This sub-section has shown that ways to hold processes over time are an important component of structural community development. While a structure to move the work forward and achieve goals is needed, it is also important to ensure solidarity amongst members is maintained, even when groups diversify their membership over time.

In conclusion, the previous three sub-sections have shown that structural community development is a multi-faceted theory with three components. Firstly, structural community development includes the intersubjective (Sharrock 2010:100), that is, the collective social processes that give rise to an understanding of how structure is constituted and how agency is developed. These are the collective social processes and relationship building that occurs when critically analysing, visioning and taking the practical steps to bring that vision into reality. It was argued that these processes should also be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating how power is produced and reproduced in both communities and in wider society. Secondly, the act of structuring, the second component of a multi-faced theory, included ideas about sustaining processes, the degree to which community groups have control of decisions, and also that structuring takes place beyond the local. Thirdly, the structures developed and maintained to hold such processes created the final component of a multi-faceted theory. This involved ensuring a sense of safety for participants and building solidarity with members, creating a base for their work.

The nature of structural community development, being about both visioning and enacting that vision, speaks to both constructivist and normative processes in which people engage. The following sub-section explores theoretical perspectives to explain these phenomena as concurrent processes in practice.

8.3.4 Holding Both the Constructivist and Normative Dimensions of a Theory Together

The previous sections revisited the distillations from the findings about the diverse meanings of structure, suggesting a multi-faceted theory. Practitioners both construct meanings of structure and create structure in their work. Therefore, this research has also shown that a theory of structural community development is one that holds in tension both constructivist and normative dimensions of practice. The constructivist refers to what could be happening, or how the world could be. The normative refers to what should be happening or how the world should be, and also how practitioners are creating norms regarding what they perceive to be the usual or correct way of doing things. This movement between the could and the should requires navigation through a range of tensions, which make for complexity, particularly when one considers the nature of trans-local work, that is, work making micro-macro or micro-structural connections.

Structure as ‘meaning-making processes’ and structure as ‘action to create structure’ require a reflexive loop. The constructivist element of theorising requires imagination to think about structure differently, that is, ways in which it is not deterministic or ideologically unjust. However, Brookfield (2005) and West (1999), whose theorising was discussed earlier in this chapter, made points about action or the reification of particular theoretical perspectives that can exacerbate or actually perpetuate injustice and oppression if not uncritically examined. Therefore, reflexivity is needed to examine situations from a range of theoretical perspectives, otherwise stagnation, the status-quo, or the repetition of practice that perpetuates the most essentialising elements of structure may remain.

Two examples of this kind of reflexivity were discussed in Chapter Six. Story # 8, concerned a group who formed a regional cooperative. This group aimed to be qualitatively different from other kinds of regional entities they had known, that is, those comprised of local organisations that had amalgamated and lost their ability to be effective locally. Through

their innovative cooperative structure, they have strengthened the individual positions of each organisation and have remained responsive and locally-relevant. This level of responsiveness attests to their commitment to both the development of disparate local communities and of the wider region, through their collaborative efforts as a formal co-operative. Story # 3, concerned a network that developed dual structures, one that holds informal elements of a network which they believe fosters mutuality and inclusivity, and a parallel auspice organisation with the legal status to enable various activities of the network. Both of these examples indicate that members hold particular values, and use imagination to think about structure in ways that reflect those values. In both these cases, they have formed and maintained structures in spite of more traditional or dominant ways of structuring their entities. They are navigating complexity when attempting to hold a number of factors in tension, and in the case of the former, are making micro-macro connections when structuring beyond the local level.

Kaplan (1996) provides some helpful theorising in relation to this discussion about holding the constructivist and normative dimensions of practice together. He wrote about the failings of development practice and called for a new stance, or a form of development practice that is about new ways of thinking and being in the world (Kaplan 1996). Kaplan posited that, if it is true that the development of people refers primarily to evolving consciousness, any description of the development process necessarily entails the idea of “emergent consciousness” (1996:68).

Individually, organisationally and socially, development implies the emergence of a new way of being in the world; a new thinking (Kaplan 1996:68).

This line of argument seems pertinent, particularly in relation to the examples provided above, where practitioners are consciously building new kinds of structures. They think about the goals they are seeking and they create the structures they need to enable the fulfillment of those goals.

Kaplan emphasised the ability to work with opposites constructively and draw creatively from tension and conflict, what he names as “consciously-balanced action”, and to cultivate “three-fold thinking – the unity of opposites in a greater whole” (Kaplan 1996:80-81). This process, Kaplan (1996:80) argued, includes awareness of consequences and implications of

actions, the ability to forge new meaning in the absence of rules and given norms and, thus, the capacity for self-reflection (Kaplan 1996:80).

The ability to forge new meaning in the absence of rules is particularly pertinent to this study. What was heard, time and again, in the stories of practitioners was that their development practice was forging new ground. The regional co-operative story, referred to above, concluded with the practitioner asking rhetorical questions about the efficacy of their structuring work. This is exactly the kind of awareness and meaning-making process to which Kaplan is referring. Many stories told by practitioners suggested the development process is an exercise in the unknown. That is, it creates new realities, new types of structures and, because of this newness, groups make rules up as they go, in-situ. The rules they create directly relate to their construction of the world-as-it-could-be, and their ongoing work involves the processes of bringing that vision into reality.

In conclusion, a multi-faced theory of structure also fosters new imaginations of structure – those held in tension between the constructed and the normative, those that liberate or emancipate, and those that do not perpetuate or create new forms of oppression. Structure as a metaphor may symbolize the objective, the real, and that which represents essentialism, individuality, and overburdening responsibility. Alternatively, creativity in the midst of complexity, such as the type of complex processes needed to respond to the concerns of people discussed in this study, could benefit from three-fold thinking. This is thinking that encompasses both sides of an oppositional debate, or what Kaplan (1996) eloquently describes as the attempt to achieve unity through diversity. Further ways to act creatively in the midst of complexity can be viewed in terms of models for practice. Blaikie (2010:154) argues that abstract descriptions generated from everyday accounts can formulate ideal types (Kim 2008). Referring to Weber's (1958) depiction of an ideal type of the Protestant work ethic, Blaikie preferences the construction of ideal types that involve "abstract second-order descriptions", that is, models (2010:156). The everyday accounts of community development practitioners have been used to suggest a model for practice. The model has been developed from the integration of the three frameworks presented separately in Chapter Seven. These, held together, could be considered a normative model for a theory of Structural Community Development.

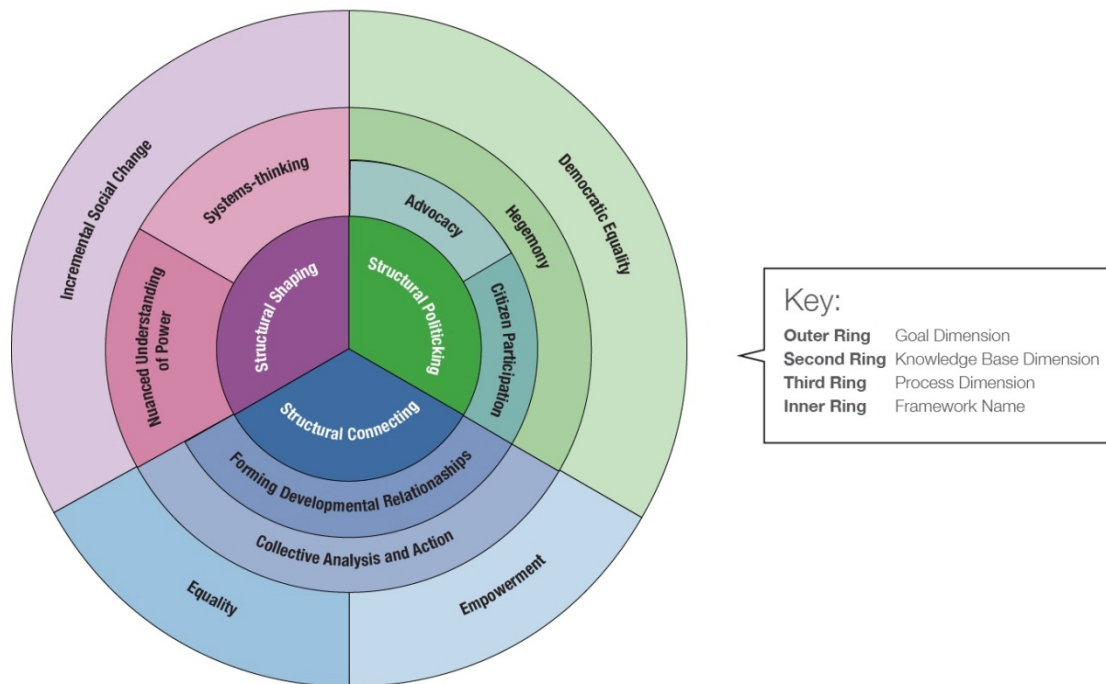
8.4 A Model of Structural Community Development

Chapter Seven answered two research questions. The first related to frameworks of practice that emerged from the data. The second determined which aspects of those frameworks were more likely to create theory-action congruency and, hence, increase the effectiveness of practice. Practitioners use frameworks to make sense of and organise their work. Frameworks are comprised of concepts, known as “key dimensions”, and these dimensions relate to one another in particular ways. Three distinct organising frameworks were presented in Chapter Seven. They included:

1. Dimensions that all practitioners in the sample have in common, which is called *Structural Connecting*.
2. Dimensions that provide the greatest theory-action congruency amongst the sample, which is called *Structural Shaping*.
3. Dimensions that showed the greatest degree of divergence amongst the sample around how the work is seen as political engagement. The divergence involves the degree to which work is practitioner-led or community-member / citizen-led, which is called *Structural Politicking*.

Together, the frameworks can be represented diagrammatically. See (Figure 11) below. They are a visual representation of the three frameworks in one diagram. Each framework is independent of the others.

Figure 11: The Three Frameworks



The next three sub-sections revisit the key dimensions of these frameworks. The lens to revisit these frameworks relates to the discussion in Chapter Six on theory-action congruency, theorised by Argyris and Schön (1974). It was argued in that chapter that there are contextual factors linked to theory-action congruency, and when these are viewed in light of the various frameworks, they make an argument for a theory of structural community development. Before that discussion, however, the three frameworks are re-introduced in the next three sub-sections.

8.4.1 Structural Connecting

The first framework, *Structural Connecting*, highlighted the collective nature of this work and articulated four key dimensions to which all participants related as agents of social change. They included: the creation of *developmental relationships*; the creation of *community analysis and action*; and goals around *equality* and *empowerment*. The formation of developmental relationships are those characterised by experiences of mutuality, such as seen in Buber's (1937) theory of 'I-Thou', which valorizes communication as *communion*.

The structural nature of these relationships supported ideas from Owen and Westoby (2011) about the “purposeful” nature of developmental relationships, which lay the foundation for “pragmatic strategy”, that is, the instrumental focus of collective action. When discussing “mandate”, Owen and Westoby (2011) raised issues about the degree to which practice is conducted *with* community members, that is, the motivations and interests of community members, compared with more directive emphases in which practitioners privilege organisational imperatives. Creating conditions for the establishment of a *community analysis*, leading to collective action, was discussed as an area that seemed most problematic for some practitioners.

Social change, as an overall aim of community development, was discussed in terms of creating a more egalitarian society, as well as processes of empowerment for participants of groups. A distinction was made between these two emphases, based on the degree to which participants viewed community development as addressing the root causes of oppression, that is, the reason people become disadvantaged in the first instance.

In summary, *Structural Connecting* is about the formation of developmental relationships and the subsequent collective analysis established with members of groups, which creates circumstances leading to collective action. The action undertaken is either working towards the greater goal of structural change, such as creating more egalitarian societies, or the greater goal of the ongoing empowerment for people involved in community development processes.

8.4.2. Structural Shaping

The second framework, *Structural Shaping*, highlighted that *structures can be acted upon*. This framework articulated three key dimensions. They included: *a nuanced understanding of power*; the need for *systems-thinking*; and the goal of *incremental social change*. The practitioners who drew from these dimensions also drew from the dimensions in the previous framework, *Structural Connecting*. However, this idea, that practice has the ability to shape context rather than context always shaping practice, was the key feature of this framework. The goal of incremental social change reflects the long-term nature of processes, which are often subject to change as new analyses and new opportunities for action emerge.

A nuanced understanding of power, as a key dimension of this framework, showed that practitioners draw from postmodern interpretations about power, where power is viewed from various dimensions of space, level and form (Gaventa 2006). Having the ability to analyse and harness power across these dimensions simultaneously, Gaventa (2006) argues, leads to transformative, fundamental change.

In their use of systems-thinking, practitioners showed they were thinking about the system as connected, both horizontally and vertically. The challenge for this type of thinking, Wheatley (2006) argues, is to step back far enough to appreciate how fragments of the whole move and change as a coherent entity. Moreover, inherent in this theorising is the idea that the system is capable of solving its own problems. Therefore, new realities are co-created as participants make “critical connections” through webs of relations (Wheatley 2006:45).

In summary, *Structural Shaping* analyses power in a range of ways. This, coupled with systems-thinking, provides a degree of agency to shape or effect structural change as multiple avenues for action are considered across the system. Incremental change is the type of change being sought, where processes involve moving forward towards goals, yet remain open to the numerous possibilities that may emerge through ongoing reflection and collective analysis.

8.4.3 Structural Politicking

The third framework, *Structural Politicking*, emphasised that structural community development is about *political engagement*, particularly as it relates to the apparatus of the state. This framework featured three key dimensions, including the concept *an analysis of hegemony* and two divergent process dimensions where practitioners either influence through *advocacy*, or are involved in processes of working with community members, that is, *citizen participation* in political engagement. The overall goal of this dimension was *democratic equality*. As with the framework *Structural Shaping*, the practitioners who drew from these *Politicking* dimensions also drew from those presented in the first framework, *Structural Connecting*.

Politics is a factor in this framework primarily because the role of the state was very much in the foreground for the majority of practitioners. They saw themselves as political actors in the context of the state.

Hegemony, a key dimension in this framework, is defined as a process where a dominant group exercises control over other social groups (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009). Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) original theorising, hegemony explains the subtle way in which dominant attitudes become 'common sense' or internalised. This is a process that marginalises or silences groups (Ledwith & Springett 2010). With this analysis, practitioners sought to increase democratic equality through greater citizenship. Their work aims to ensure that people's views, especially those not normally considered by powerful structures, can have greater political impact.

In a "pluralistic" sense (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009:33), practitioners tended to engage in practitioner-advocacy about, or on behalf of, marginalised groups. Therefore, there is a sense that this practice is about *inclusion*, demanding the state include or consider particular groups in society more equally. However, practitioners' sense of efficacy in this realm of structural practice was low, as they tended to speak in very aspirational terms about the impact of their advocacy.

If structural practice was seen as a process for activating citizenship, then citizen participation and engagement became the key process for achieving democratic equality. This is the kind of politics in which people are not empowered by leaders, but empower themselves when they develop skills and habits of collaborative action (Boyte 2008). This allows them to change institutions and systems, making them more supportive of civic agency (Boyte 2008).

In summary, with an analysis of hegemony, political engagement or politicking, was seen as a form of structural practice. This practice is one that works towards democratic equality through either practitioner advocacy or activating citizen engagement.

The degree to which this, and the other frameworks presented, should be incorporated into a theory of structural community development can be theorised through the lens of theory-action congruency. The next sub-section revisits the discussion in Chapter Six regarding

Argyris and Schön's (1974) theorising about the effectiveness of professional practice and then makes links with the three frameworks discussed above.

8.4.4 Theory-Action Congruency and the Three Frameworks

Chapter Six (Section 6.2), discussed Argyris and Schön's (1974:21-23) contention that competence is based on congruency between a practitioners' "espoused theories", or what they say they do, and their "theories-in-use", or their actual action. Through that lens, the data suggested a number of incongruities when practitioners discussed responses to questions about the purpose of their community development work (espoused theory), and the stories they told about what they are doing daily to achieve that purpose (theories-in-use). When examining the data, a number of problematic circumstances emerged and it was posited that these could explain this lack of congruency. The factors included:

- The practitioner's organisational base and its mandate at levels beyond the local or within the broader sector;
- The amount of infrastructure that exists or is created and used as vehicles to take agendas forward, and to influence;
- The extent to which practitioners have clear processes for their work and have reasonable expectations about outcomes;
- The length of time it takes to effect change and their perseverance through lengthy processes;
- The extent to which practitioners have an 'experimental' or 'action-research' mindset, which allows them to make sense of what is occurring in the dynamic, ever-evolving context for community development.

As discussed in Chapter Six, when analysing the data, I allocated the research participants a low-congruency/high-congruency rating, based on these factors.

Eight practitioners demonstrated low congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice. It was suggested that the low rating was attributed to particular issues, such as: having multiple roles; lack of practice experience; issues directly related to their employing organisation; or, their geographic isolation.

Fourteen practitioners demonstrated high congruency between their espoused practice and their actual practice. The higher congruency was attributed to particular circumstances, such as: having training in community development practice; having considerable work experience in and knowledge of the social service system; or choosing to work on a narrow range of issues over long periods of time. This latter factor stands in contrast to work conducted in place-based settings, for example, in neighbourhood centres or in regional areas, where many and diverse issues pertinent to those communities are responded to in practice. Furthermore, three practitioners in this high congruency group are working voluntarily, that is, outside the social service system. They are creating community-owned networks and organisations that did not rely heavily on Government funding. Compared with the others who practice within social service contexts, this group seems to have fewer constraints imposed on their practice, which may provide a strong sense of autonomy and, therefore, agency and efficacy.

When looking at associations between theory-action congruency and the three frameworks, a number of observations can be made. Firstly, all practitioners drew from the dimensions of *Structural Connecting*. However, as seen above, theory-action congruency across the sample of twenty-two participants within this framework was mixed. Therefore, the factors for theory-action congruency do not show a strong relationship to the key dimensions of the *Structural Connecting* framework. Too much diversity existed to make strong associations, apart from those listed in the dot points above.

This stands in stark contrast to the theory-action congruency of the four practitioners drawing on the framework *Structural Shaping*, which was high for all. As discussed, these practitioners saw the big picture. They took a whole-system view and analysed power in multiple ways. They also had an action-research or experimental stance. With a learning-as-we-go mindset, they looked for possibilities to move incrementally forward towards their overall goals.

A similar result of theory-action congruency was found in relation to the framework *Structural Politicking*. Chapter Seven discussed the decision to set aside a group for whom political engagement *was not* a feature of practice. It was suggested that a relationship seems to exist between those with low theory-action congruency and a view that the apparatus of the state is located as a background factor for practice. Human resourcing issues (multiple roles),

organisational issues and geographic isolation were all associated with low theory-action congruency, and these factors could provide an explanation about practitioner reluctance or inability to politically engage with the state.

For the remaining participants who indicated that the state *was* in the foreground of their practice, political dimensions were drawn upon in practice. The majority of these practitioners had high theory-action congruency. These practitioners fell into two groups, according to their structural practice. The first group acted as advocates on behalf of disadvantaged groups, and the second group engaged in more direct methods of citizen development and citizen action.

When looking for an association between practitioners who draw on the dimensions of *Structural Shaping* (and have high theory-action congruency) *and* the location of practice, that is, local-level only work or work across levels, one sole practitioner stood out from the sample. Q7's work was described in the story told in Chapter Seven about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Solidarity group. Q7's practice reflects those attributes found in all three dimensions of *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. One could argue that the features of Q7's practice reflect *all* aspects of a theory of structural *community* development. Arguably, if the community is not involved in all aspects of practice, the work could not be considered community development. Q7's narrative was explicit about community members being integral to all processes.

What was also shown was that, with a structural analysis about disadvantage, Q7's practice necessarily moves beyond the local level to effect change at the sites where oppressive conditions originate. The ATSI Solidarity group makes structural links with people located in structures found on the vertical dimension, that is, they structure beyond the local level. Because community members are integral to all processes, this suggests Q7 has a feedback loop with community members about the issues affecting their daily lives. Opportunities for analysis about what could be effective practice may not be present where community members are not integral to the work.

Moreover, Q7's persistence over time is a factor for effectiveness. Practitioners with the highest theory-action congruency had a median length of 16.5 practice years, indicating that experiencing both successes and challenges over time may increase a sense of efficacy about

the possibilities of this approach for practice. This also suggests that training for less experienced practitioners and other forms of practice support is warranted. Additionally, Q7 explicitly focuses on a relatively narrow set of issues, those for Indigenous Australians. This suggests that achieving depth in practice is more effective than breadth if working within such frameworks. Breadth in practice involves allocating time and resources to a diversity of issues or population groups, and this may not provide the conditions needed for effective practice.

Although no actual ‘significance’ arguments can be made because of the qualitative nature of this study, it is hard to ignore the fact that only one practitioner out of twenty-two discussed practice in ways that associate with the entire range of themes distilled for structural community development practice. Other practitioners related to a majority of the themes, particularly those operating outside the social service system. However, being integral to the system, that is, being in receipt of state funding to enable practice, as was the case with Q7, seems to have assisted with the effectiveness of achieving specific practice goals. This suggests that state funding endows a type of legitimacy, so that the work with these community members has greater credence. Shaw (2007) argues that the social policy context can be a vehicle whereby people’s potential as active subjects in politics is enabled. People in ‘community’ are simultaneously constructed as objects of policy through community development, and sites where people’s real interests are engaged, and where policy could be changed (Shaw 2007). The emphasis taken in Q7’s work, to both include new participants through educative processes and create structural links with people who are more directly connected to the apparatus of the state, seems, in this case, to have been an effective way of working.

Further, the way this group sets up multiple pathways for outsiders into their processes, and the way they hold both task-oriented and relationship-building goals in tandem, shows this work has parallels with the type of processes seen in social movements. New social movements are a major means by which people define needs and make claims, exercising significant pressure on social policies and the state’s resources (Leonard 1999:156). As opposed to traditional social movements based on a specific class identity and workplace, the politics of identity – gender, culture, sexuality, age, disability, race – characterise new social movements (Leonard 1999:156). Further, social movements are often equated with a politics of protest or dissent (Ledwith 2011:199). Writing in the British context, Ledwith argues that

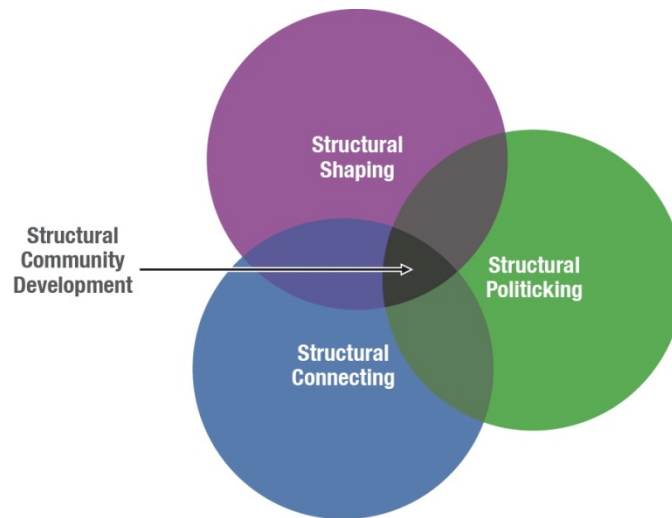
the politics of protest is not readily equated with British culture, but more often with Latin American communities, where “the courage to speak one’s truth is evident in public places” (2011:199). The politics of protest may be equally unfamiliar to the Australian context. However, in so far as structural community development seems to be activating spaces for deliberation and action, whilst also building social solidarity with a broad range of people, it can be seen as drawing from ideas found in new social movement theory. Practice was not discussed, to a great extent, as dissent or protest, although the idea that this type of practice is subversive was discussed. In essence, these types of solidarity-building processes are purposefully creating more and more ways to build relationships, that is, a base of solidarity with a broad range of people just like those needed for effective social movements.

To conclude this sub-section, it is posited that, held together, the three frameworks and the elements that create high theory-action congruency signpost a normative model of Structural Community Development. Practitioners who draw more heavily from particular elements of specific frameworks presented could benefit from integrating additional elements from other frameworks presented, as they may find these elements help them attain their practice goals. Further discussion about the practical implications for this theory is explored in the following section.

8.5 The Practical Implications of this Theory of Structural Community Development

This research project set out to develop a *useful theory* of Structural Community Development, one that has an emancipatory agenda, seeking to redress inequality for particular groups in society. It follows, therefore, that the measure of usefulness of a practice theory is that it should suggest practical ways to achieve such an emancipatory agenda. Practitioners in this study were found to draw from the framework *Structural Connecting* and, to varying degrees, elements of the other two frameworks, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. It is suggested that, by integrating these frameworks to a greater extent, practitioners can strengthen the structural nature of their community development work. Such integration can be represented diagrammatically. See (Figure 12) below.

Figure 12: The Three Frameworks Integrated



Four practical suggestions follow from an integration of the three frameworks.

Firstly, participants discussed that structural community development involves having a structural analysis about power and disadvantage. This informs the type of work in which practitioners become involved, and the relationships they build. Practitioners are in a unique and privileged position to hear stories of struggle, as well as people's hopes and dreams. Engagement in purposeful action as a response to those stories involves listening for the public dimension, or public issues, within those private stories. Having heard the public issues repeated by a number of individuals, practitioners have a mandate to pursue collective processes, to structure their dialogue with community members, and to initiate and maintain public action. A useful theory of structural community development is one that includes action to achieve a mandate for issues of a public nature, leading to collective action.

Secondly, participants discussed the concept of creating opportunities for community members to develop these same types of analyses. This idea was either held implicitly by practitioners, or discussed as a challenging aspect of the practice. Helping people develop critical thinking can be problematic, and could account for the paucity of stories in the data about these processes. Therefore, developing skills that create the conditions for community members' structural analysis seems critical. The backdrop to these processes relates to a key

factor, that structural community development is essentially about politics. It is political in the socio-cultural-political sense, that is, how an individual's lifeworld is shaped both by history and current contexts. It is also political in the empowerment sense, that is, an individual's lifeworld can be acted upon or shaped through collective action.

Participants also discussed the need for processes of structural community development to structure beyond the local level. This collective action connects the micro and macro levels of society. This is the realm where community development crosses over with political theory, as a vehicle for democratic renewal. Inequality and poverty persist because of ideological positions that have ascendancy at this time in our history. Processes that enable civic participation leading to greater citizenship, therefore, are integral to a practitioner's stance as a political actor. With an analysis that inequality serves to benefit the few, a useful theory of structural community development is one that places citizenship at its centre, and views practitioners as political actors.

Thirdly, structural community development involves creating structures as platforms for action. These are safe spaces where people can deliberate together, explore a variety of issues, engage in a variety of analyses and use their imagination to create a vision for the world-as-it-could-be. Drawing on systems-thinking, a variety of analyses means that these are multiple pathways into the structure, and multiple relationships are built. Often, these structures can be seen as spaces of resistance where, with a nuanced understanding of power and because of non-binary thinking, creative ways of acting emerge. These transcend the constraints of modernism or structuralism. Further, with an analysis that sustaining action over time is needed to effect change, a useful theory of structural community development is one that holds these elements of dialectical spaces together and seeks incremental social change over time.

Finally, practitioners involved in structural community development are engaged in praxis. Navigating the complexity of practice contexts, particularly within the current political ideology of neo-liberalism and managerialism, as well as remembering the practice's critical theoretical orientation, requires a stronger theoretical and reflective base from which to operate. Bridging the theory-practice divide, that is, theorising from empirical investigation *and* the systematic reflection by practitioners on theory that already exists, seems to be of critical importance for praxis.

To this end, it has been proposed that ongoing communities of practice are vehicles through which praxis is achieved. This study modeled, in a very small way, the type of process being called for, where practitioners came together to co-investigate a specific area of practice. In this study's case, the specific area investigated was 'structure', and to some degree practitioners co-constructed its diverse meanings and theorised its implications for practice. Practitioner feedback from Stage Two indicated that this type of collective process of reflection was helpful for both their individual understanding and knowledge-building, and also their ability to improve their practice. Therefore, a useful theory of structural community development is one that takes time to develop praxis.

In summary, four practical implications exist for a useful theory of structural community development including: action to achieve a mandate for issues of a public nature; viewing this practice as a form of political engagement; the importance of creating structures for deliberation and action; and the importance of processes for praxis. These stem from the multi-faceted theory discussed earlier in this chapter and the model comprising the dimensions from the three frameworks. That being the case, based on the contested terrain of community development, an argument can be made about a problem with positing a normative model. The next section discusses this problem.

8.5.1 A Caveat - The Problem with a Normative Model

In Chapter Three, the community development literature was examined by looking at various historical epochs of community development theory and practice. It was argued that a historical view was taken because important lessons could be learned from a critical reading of the past, with its parallels and continuities, but also because of recurring theoretical discontinuities and re-emergent practice dilemmas (Mayo 2008). What was seen through that historical overview was that community development has been, and continues to this day to be, a contested term and field. Indeed, the review demonstrated that the term 'community' and its associated practice has been and is still used in a myriad of ways, and is appropriated to justify a range of ideological positions. Its very "elasticity" (Shaw 2007) or "fuzziness" (Biddle 1966) can be problematic for practitioners in the field if they are not clear about several issues, including: the purpose of the practice; the ideology that informs various

practice approaches, particularly those associated with funded programs; and how best to use the myriad of techniques that are associated with this practice. Indeed, Shaw (2003:45), writing about the nexus of social policy, politics and community development practice, quotes Gary Craig, who argues,

Community work is too often drawn into the latest fashions of government policy agendas because that is where the funding is, rather than developing and maintaining a clear analysis to inform action. Increasingly, the emphasis on training seems to be on skills to the exclusion of thinking about theory and politics of community work (at both micro and macro levels). Practice is dominated by the policy and political context rather than creating it.

Because of these factors, this study has attempted to suggest *a* normative model theorising structure. However, it is acknowledged that this structural model sits alongside other models, some of which have been referred to in the literature review, for example, Ledwith's (2011) *Critical* approach, Gilchrist's (2009) *Networking* approach, and the *Developmental Method* found in Ingamells et al. (2011). It became clear throughout this study that there is *no single way* to engage in practice and it follows, therefore, that there is *no single way* to theorise practice. What this research project has achieved, however, is to make explicit *a theory about structure*, one with an explicit agenda to construct knowledge 'from below', whilst holding on to an emancipatory approach to practice. Therefore, this caveat about positing a normative model seeks to emphasise that practitioners need to reflect on various models and approaches to practice and bring elements of such theorising into their own personal framework for practice (Westoby & Ingamells 2011). These two processes, firstly, reflection on theory and secondly, making theory explicit through personal practice frameworks, should be helpful. They would assist practitioners to develop a cogent analysis about the complexity involved in their work, enabling them to respond more creatively and constructively in their community development efforts.

The theory posited in this chapter has implications for further research and education. This is discussed in the following section.

8.6 The Implications for Further Research and Education

This section discusses implications for a theory of structural community development in relation to further research and how some of the theory's concepts could be integrated into community development education.

8.6.1 Theory-testing is Needed

The exploratory nature of this study supports this theory-building process. However, to make this theory truly useful, processes to verify the extent of its relevance should be employed next. This particularly relates to the ideas discussed about theory-action congruency and those distilled as a model for practice.

In his “manifesto for social research”, Blaikie (2010:10) argues that a deductive research strategy is one that tests theories by testing hypotheses derived from them. A deductive research strategy can use both quantitative and qualitative methods and, with the latter, hypotheses testing can be seen in terms of a discursive argument from evidence (Blaikie 2010). A discursive argument is used here in the sense that thinking is directed at trying to understand the deeper causes or meanings of social phenomena (Ransome 2010:434). Therefore, having a base of theory from which to start deeper analysis of phenomena is essential, and this research project has enabled such processes of theory testing to occur.

The theory posited in this chapter is an interpretation of data based on the voices of twenty-two experienced practitioners. It was argued earlier that these interpretations might not have universal recognition. However, exploring the theory with a wider cohort of practitioners across a wider range of practice contexts would more comprehensively reveal the value of the theory for the field. This is particularly pertinent to the discussion on theory-action congruency. The five factors proposed as explanations for discrepancies between practitioners' espoused theories and theories-in-use could benefit from more thorough investigation. This process would be particularly useful as it relates to practice-specific contexts, where similar work is undertaken. The diversity of practice contexts found across the twenty-two practitioners in this study generated the five explanations for incongruency/congruency. However, more targeted investigation could reveal other

explanations and analyses. These kinds of practice-specific investigations could also benefit policy-making processes, as evidence about effective practice may be helpful when policy makers consider how they distribute resources, and establish program directions for community development.

8.6.2 Implications for Community Development Education

Community development is a practical activity, requiring of its practitioners a range of analyses and skills. Three implications for structural community development education result from this research project, which include: the centrality of politics in education; key skills required for citizenship development; and practitioner access to community development education.

Firstly, the proposed model argues that community development practitioners understand the political nature of the practice to a greater degree. In Chapter Seven (Section 7.5.3), it was suggested that community members have become depoliticised because of neo-liberal drivers, and a trend seen with new types of governance arrangements. The example used discussed the loss of support for small community organisations in favour of larger organisations, and the link community development has with state governments rather than local governments to support local initiatives. It was argued that people in local communities have become dislocated from relationships, organisations and democratic processes that can carry their voice. It would follow that such depoliticisation has also occurred with practitioners. Practitioners, too, are members of local communities and, if they are employed in this work, they are part of these new processes of governance. Community development education framed around depoliticisation processes and, practitioners as political actors should be incorporated into educational opportunities for practitioners. A greater emphasis on the practice as it relates to critical theory and political theory also seems warranted.

Secondly, there was an emphasis in the model on activating citizenship and civic development. Skills for citizenship development enable collective processes, particularly micro skills, to develop purposeful relationships and group work skills that form the basis for work linking the personal with structural concerns. Another skill set relates to the act of structuring processes, that is, how groups develop; formalise (or not); partner with others (or

not); and institutionalise effective processes so they become routine. In essence, it involves how they decide what shape and form their community development structures will take to hold processes over time. These very practical skills, which seem critical to civic development, might involve the use of dialogue with community members. Two practical examples include Ledwith's (2011:68-73) approaches to storytelling and constructing counter-narratives; and Westoby and Dowling's dialogical approach (2009:202-207), which seeks to build solidarity through the "deconstructive conversation". These types of approaches, or others like them, should have a greater emphasis in community development education so practitioners have opportunities to develop these skills.

The final point regarding community development education relates to issues of access to education. Lack of community development training was identified as one of the possible explanations for low theory-action congruency amongst the sample for this study. Boulet (2010) argues that, in Australia, community development has minimal representation in social work and other curricula, particularly in relation to societal-structural impediments to realise the practices' ideals. Further, it pales into insignificance compared with the research and theorising that explores other practice approaches. My personal experience as a research student at the University of Queensland attests to the limited investigation of the field. Out of the 70+ research-by-higher-degree students in the social work and human services program, I am one of few exploring development practice, attesting to its under-theorised status. However, this subject matter, in various forms, is taught at this institution across a number of undergraduate and postgraduate courses. These circumstances all reinforce the need for practitioners to develop their own communities of practice so collective theorising can take place despite any lack of educational opportunities they may have had. From where I stand as a recent practitioner and beginning researcher, I believe academic institutions in general could be more supportive of practitioners, not just in terms of systematic practice research, but also in terms of a range of educational opportunities, beyond those associated with undergraduate and post-graduate degree programs.

8.7 Conclusion

This research set out to solve an "intellectual puzzle" (Mason 2002:13), that is, a set of circumstances that I, as a practitioner, viewed as problematic for community development.

My training in community development taught me that it is a practice through which people can experience liberation from oppression, in particular, experiences of oppression derived from various structures and systems in society as they impact on the lives of individuals, groups and whole communities (Mullaly 2007). Further, because community development is a social practice, it is inextricably linked to the 'how to', that is, practical ways in which community development can work towards the amelioration of structural oppression. However, there exists a vast array of social contexts in which the practice operates and the literature review outlined a myriad of theoretical positions informing the practice.

The study's aim was to explore how community development is reducing structural disadvantage and to develop theoretical and methodological foundations for structural community development. In the process of dialogue between participants and myself, during which theory informed my questions and prompts, we were able to tease out some of the problems associated with structural practice and also co-construct a model for practice. Structural Community Development is a multi-faceted theory and features three frameworks: *Structural Connecting*, *Structural Shaping* and *Structural Politicking*. The study provides four practical suggestions to assist community development practitioners to better align their aspirations for practice with actual outcomes of practice. They include: the importance of having a structural analysis about power and disadvantage; opportunities for community members to engage politically; the creation of structures to enable deliberation and action; and the systematic reflection on theory and practice as praxis.

This study developed an effective theory of structural community development, one that contributes to the literature as well as providing practical direction in-situ, that is, in the places where practice occurs.

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Appendix 1, Participant Information Sheet



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Participant Information Sheet

Project Title:

**An investigation into the relationship between structure
and community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development**

Researcher: Ms. Athena Lathouras (known as Tina)

Contact Details:

Ms. Athena Lathouras
PhD Candidate
School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences
University of Queensland
Phone: 0413 738 623
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Research Advisors:

Professor Jill Wilson
Principle Advisor
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Dr Peter Westoby
Associate Advisor
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What is the purpose of the study?

I am seeking the assistance of community development practitioners to participate in a research project about practice.

The aim of this project is to develop a useful theory for contemporary community development practice. Currently, community development is a complex and contested practice due to the various and fragmented theoretical underpinnings and the broad-ranging policy contexts and practice approaches in community development practice.

This research project will investigate one particular aspect of community development practice – structural aspects of community development practice. Current literature references structural aspects of community development, however, these ideas are not readily translated into practical approaches or methods for practice.

Who is being interviewed?

The research will take place in two Australian states – **Queensland and Victoria**.

Participants will be selected against a range of specific criteria. They will:

- be **currently working in the field** (therefore not people who are solely academics or commentators on the field; though it is noted that some academics may also be practitioners); **and**
- have had **three or more years experience** as community development practitioners;
- either be working in an urban context; **or**
- working in a regional or rural context;
- either be employed by a Non-Government agency; **or**
- employed by a Government agency; and
- be working in a range of fields or contexts eg neighbourhood / local work; regional / peak work; **or** specialised areas, such as micro-finance or working with people from CALD backgrounds etc.

How will information be collected?

Information will be collected through three main methods:

- an individual in-depth interview;
- an opportunity to reflect on a small ‘findings’ paper generated from a synthesis of content from the interviews; and
- an opportunity to participate in a group meeting process.

Please note however, it is envisaged that not all practitioners who participate in an in-depth interview will want to respond to the findings paper, or will want to participate in the group meeting process. All aspects of participation at any of the stages are completely voluntary.

The in-depth interviews will take approximately 60 - 90 minutes and the group meeting, with membership comprised of the previously interviewed practitioners, will take approximately 90 minutes – two hours. The in-depth interviews will be audio-recorded with the participant’s permission. Interviews will be conducted in a place that is convenient for the participants. The two group meetings, one held in Queensland and one held in Victoria, are where a group of practitioners will gather together to discuss pertinent issues, at a location central to the

majority of participants who wish to take part. These groups will be facilitated by me, and with the aid of an observer/note-taker, the summarised content of key discussions will be recorded on butcher's paper. The observer will not be associated with the community development field. The person chosen as observer will be made known to the group participants at the commencement of the planning for the group processes. At which time your approval will be sought for the inclusion of the person as an observer in the group. The group meeting processes will also be audio-recorded, with participant's permission, to ensure all aspects of the discussions are accurately captured.

What will participants be asked to do?

Participants will mainly be asked to reflect on various aspects of your work. Because this will elicit an array of practice approaches, and to narrow down the breadth of information, the types of questions asked will place emphasis on various aspects of 'structure'. For example: the structures you work with, and perhaps at times, resist or work against; the type of structures you help create and sustain and the associated outcomes this has for people you work with. You will also be asked to reflect on your practice approaches in relation to the particular field of community development you are working in; and the opportunities, issues and challenges you are currently facing in your development work.

If you are interested in participating in an interview, or would like more information please contact me, Tina Lathouras, on Mobile: 0413 738 623 or Email: t.lathouras@uq.edu.au.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the study is voluntary and anyone who agrees to participate may refuse, at any time, to: answer any questions, attend interviews or groups, or receive the findings paper. They may also withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. This will not affect your relationship with the University of Queensland.

What are the benefits of the study to you?

The main benefit to participants will be the opportunity to reflect on your practice approaches and if you get involved in the group process, to engage in a collective knowledge building exercise with your colleagues, which will generate ideas about a structural dimensions of practice.

A more indirect benefit of your participation in this study will be to the cohort of current and future community development practitioners, as the results of the study may be presented at conferences, forums and in publications.

Will my privacy be respected?

All information provided by participants will be kept strictly confidential and no names or any other identifying information about participants, or others who they engage in practice with practitioners, will be included in any report on the study.

Likewise, establishing the group processes will also include establishing agreements for participant confidentiality.

All data (transcripts and consent forms) will be stored in a locked area to which only I, the researcher has access. Transcripts will be kept in a de-identified format. All audio recordings, transcripts and other written data from interviews and group processes will be destroyed at the project's conclusion.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The overall research findings, from the various data collection processes and analysis processes throughout the project, will be integrated into my final analysis in the form of the written doctoral thesis. The theoretical approach and the associated practice approaches or methods developed from this study may be presented at conferences, forums and in publications in the future. No personally identifying information will be used. Only pseudonyms will be used in the analysis, presentations and written documents from this study.

The Researcher

Ms. Tina Lathouras, doctoral candidate at the University of Queensland, will be conducting the research. I have previously worked as a community development worker.

Ethical Review

This study has been reviewed by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council Guidelines. You are free to discuss your participation in this research with Tina Lathouras or her supervisor, Professor Jill Wilson on telephone number (07) 3365 1254. If you have any concerns about the manner in which this study is being conducted, you can contact the ethics officer of the University not involved in the study, on telephone number (07) 3365 3924.

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, please contact me on, telephone number 0413 738 623 or email: t.lathouras@uq.edu.au .

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Tina Lathouras
PhD Student
School of Social Work and Human Services
University of Queensland

Appendix 2, Interview Consent Form



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INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**An investigation into the relationship between structure
and community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development**

Researcher: Athena Lathouras
PhD Student
University of Queensland
St Lucia 4068

- I have been given clear information, both written and verbal, about the study and I understand what is required of me.
- I understand that I am participating as a “qualified individual” and not as “authorized representative” of my employer organisation.
- I understand that participation is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any question and I remain free to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation.
- I understand that if I choose not to participate in this study, or choose to withdraw from the study at any time, it will not affect my relationship with the University of Queensland or my studies (present or future) in any way.
- I understand and consent to being contacted by the Researcher to advise me of the time, date and venue of the interview.
- I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes without identifying participants. All information provided during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential.
- I understand that these audio recordings will be kept in a secure filing system until they are destroyed, at the end of the research project. Further, that my name or any identifying information will not be used in reports or published papers.

- I understand that an interview will be conducted in a place convenient for the participants.
- I understand that all data collected in the interview will be de-identified and reported as group data and not individual data.
- I understand that the findings of the study will be presented at conferences and published in academic journals.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in the study and that it has no immediate impact on my work.
- I am aware that I may ask any further questions about the research study at any time.

I have read the information sheet and I hereby consent to take part in an interview as part of this research project.

Name of participant
(Print Name)

Signed Date.....

Name of Witness.....
(Print Name)

SignedDate.....

Participant Contact Details:

Email address.....

Telephone & or Mobile Number

Appendix 3, Stage 1 Interview Guide

Contexts of Practice

Q: What are the main contexts in which you work? People you work with? Your role?

Q: What would you say is the main purpose of your work? What are you trying to achieve?

Q: If I was to say words such as ‘structure’, ‘structuring’, ‘structural’, ‘structured’ what comes to mind about your CD practice? Example?

Q: Do you view your thinking about structural aspects of practice as somewhat *aspirational*, meaning you hope for it, but you know that is not very achievable in the day-to-day realities of your work?

Q: Is there a tension between what you’d like to do, compared with what you can do? Has your thinking about this changed over time? Why?

Structural Disadvantage

Q: What role do you see CD having in relation to disadvantaged people?

Q: How do see CD addressing issues of disadvantage? Is this something CD should be doing do you think?

Structure and Agency

Q: In your reflections have you experienced or seen processes of CD that enable people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation? In what ways?

Q: What have been the main barriers to stopping such transformational work?

Q: What kinds of critical inputs have been necessary for people to engage in such transformational work?

(For people in social policy / government roles particularly):

Q: Have you been involved in processes where powerful structures have been transformed in some way as a result of a CD process you’ve been involved in?

Sub-altern Counter Structures

CD is a context where people from minority groups can have a space, and find a voice. Perhaps leading to greater citizenship within our democratic system. Q: What reflections do you have about this / examples?

Q: Are you hopeful that these spaces might one day be able to influence more mainstream structures / systems? Have you experienced this?

Structuring Work Within and Between Levels or Domains

There are so many different ways that development workers utilise structures, or structure the work (groups, organisations, regional bodies etc) to assist with the ongoing management of processes or to help sustain that work. Q: How have you structured some of the work you do – particularly ways that you consider have been particularly helpful, or particularly innovative to achieving the aims of that work?

Q: Could you share that story and tell me about the structures / structuring that took place.

Q: What are the key tensions, challenges, barriers in creating/maintaining such structures?

Sometimes CD work crosses different kinds of boundaries – eg across sectors, across levels (local, regional etc), across non-government and government.

Q: Have you been involved in any work like this?

Q: What were the circumstances that led you to work across these different sectors or levels?

Methodologies for Practice

Q: When you think about practice principles or approaches you utilise to achieve the outcomes you get from your CD work, what comes to mind?

Issues, Challenges, Opportunities

Q: When you think about your current work, what barriers or difficulties do you find most challenging?

Q: What excites you most about the opportunities that exist for the people you do your community development work with, or for the field of CD?

Other

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to share that you think might be helpful information for this study?

Q: What led you to want to participate in this study?

Appendix 4, Example of Storytelling Technique used in Interviews

Researcher: Have you experienced processes of CD that have enabled people to overcome disadvantages or marginalisation? Do you have a story?

V3: I'll go with a current story. I work with a group of Somalian women. They're always setting up homework programs for their kids, sewing classes and lunches. They're really good at that kind of thing; expressing what their needs are and getting it. And there was one woman in particular who turned up regularly at work and she was great at really articulating what her community needed, I guess she would have been seen as a community leader. We worked together on small funding submissions to local government, say, to get \$1,000 for something for her community – a homework program. Together, we worked on these things and got things happening; and to see her say to her community, 'we've got this, we've done this', but she'd done it, you know, I'd supported her, and helped her along a bit, but she'd done it and got that done for her community. So this organisation, the community centre was in a housing commission area, and it became their place as well, so they could come along and do their sewing and have their meetings, outings, homework groups. Frankly, this blew me away. I was so naïve, about what their kids face; because for my kids, life's a breeze. But to see this community and this woman in particular, have pride and ownership, to see how she'd helped her community to get these things that were important to them, from just socialising over sewing or making lunches, it was great. Then we drew them into things that we did naturally – like they'd cook food for our AGM; they'd do incredible dancing at end-of-year events. By doing this you're helping them do what they want to do in their communities then obviously they are going to want to join in with what you're doing.

Researcher: So there's a reciprocity that exists?

V3: Yep, because of the respect. Culturally we accept what they want; 'this is what we do in our culture'. I think there's a great massive chasm between what we think people from refugee and migrant backgrounds need and want, and what they really want and need; because their needs are so complex.



THE UNIVERSITY
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Appendix 5, Participant Consent Form (Groups)

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Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs
CRICOS PROVIDER NUMBER 00025B

GROUP MEETING CONSENT FORM

**An investigation into the relationship between structure
and community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development**

Researcher: Athena Lathouras
PhD Student
University of Queensland
St Lucia 4068

- I have been given clear information, both written and verbal, about the study and I understand what is required of me.
- I understand that I am participating as a “qualified individual” and not as “authorized representative” of my employer organisation.
- I understand that participation is voluntary. I may refuse to answer any question and I remain free to withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation.
- I understand that if I choose not to participate in this study, or choose to withdraw from the study at any time, it will not affect my relationship with the University of Queensland or my studies (present or future) in any way.
- I understand and consent to being contacted by the Researcher to advise me of the time, date and venue of the group meeting.
- I understand that the group meetings will be audio recorded for research purposes without identifying participants.
- I understand that these audio recordings will be kept in a secure filing system until they are destroyed, at the end of the research project. Further, that my name or any identifying information will not be used in reports or published papers.

- I understand that a group meeting will be conducted in a place convenient for the majority of participants.
- I understand that all data collected in the group meeting will be de-identified and reported as group data and not individual data.
- I understand that the findings of the study will be presented at conferences and published in academic journals.
- I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in the study and that it has no immediate impact on my work.
- I am aware that I may ask any further questions about the research study at any time.

I have read the information sheet and I hereby consent to take part in a group meeting as part of this research project.

Name of participant
(*Print Name*)

Signed Date.....

Witness.....Date.....

Participant Contact Details:

Email address.....

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Appendix 6, Photo of a Conceptual Map



Appendix 7, Findings Paper

Appendix 7, Findings Paper

Findings from

Stage One of the doctoral study:

*An investigation into the relationship between structure and
community development practice:
Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development*

For the participants interviewed for the study.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Study	1
PART 1 - CONTEXTS FOR PRACTICE, ROLES AND THE PURPOSE OF CD WORK....	3
PART 2 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	4
2.1 The Idea of ‘Structure’	4
2.1.1 Structures as systems in society	5
2.1.2 Community-created structures	5
2.1.3 Structuring CD work	5
2.1.4 Structure as a space for experimenting, holding tensions	6
2.2. Structural Disadvantage	6
2.2.1 At the Heart of the Work.....	6
2.2.2. CD is everybody – so we’ll all be advantaged.....	7
3. Structure and Agency	8
4. Critical Processes that have enabled Transformation	9
5. The Transformation of Powerful Structures.....	10
5.1 Yet to see powerful structures transformed.....	10
5.2 Local Government transformed	10
5.3 Social Movements and Systemic Policy Advocacy	11
5.4 The idea of Revolution.....	12
6. Subaltern Counter Structures	12
7. Structuring Work between Levels or Domains	13
7.1 The importance of seeking change at more than one level	13
7.2 Broad range of approaches	14
PART 3 – RESEARCH QUESTION.....	14
8. Challenges with structuring.....	14
9. Barriers to Transformation and Other Challenges for Practice.....	16
9.1 Societal hegemony and colonisation.....	16
9.2 Government social policy and the impact on the sector.....	16
9.3 CD practitioner skills and practice	18
9.4 The personal costs associated with practitioner activism.....	18
10. Opportunities	19
10.1 A new epoch.....	19
10.2 What makes change happen	19
Conclusion.....	20
Bibliography.....	22

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an account of findings from the first stage of the doctoral study “*An investigation into the relationship between structure and community development practice: Towards a Theory of Structural Community Development*”. The paper is a collective document representing a glimpse into the voices and stories of the 22 community development (CD) practitioners interviewed for the study. Their descriptions and explanations about the topic have been clustered under various headings. These headings, and the themes and concepts under them represent the lens through which I have reflected on the subject matter as the researcher. They by no means represent all the wonderful stories of community development told to me during the interviews.

Words and phrases in double quotations marks indicate direct quotes from interviewees. At times an individual’s quote has been included to illustrate a range of opinions about a particular subject matter. That quote will be followed by a code indicating which participant made the comment. These de-identified codes are outlined in a legend, describing the various CD contexts for each participant in this study. The legend can be found following the paper’s conclusion.

The purpose of sharing this paper is to invite participants to continue in the research process by responding to this paper.

The Study

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to build a theory of structural community development. I propose that effective community development has several structural dimensions, of which structural change is one. New theorising is required, one that can hold the radical agenda and analysis of structural oppression, as well as integrating post modern and post-structural ideas around diverse identities and culture; and integrating a careful understanding of agency.

Because community development is a complex and contested practice its investigation calls for the use of a qualitative methodology to find answers to the research questions posed. The knowledge base, of a structural approach to community development, is drawn from practitioners who are the key informants for this study.

Research Questions

Stage 1

Q1: How do practitioners think about structure within their work?

Q2: How do practitioners put this understanding into practice?

Q3: What opportunities, issues and challenges do practitioners face when they put this into practice?

Stage 2

Q: What are the relationships between the concepts and themes embedded in the accounts of practitioners that will provide a useful theory of Structural Community Development in current contexts?

Methodology

The first stage involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 community development practitioners in Queensland and Victoria, to elicit views on community development practice based around the ideas of 'structure'. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed. A synthesis of the overarching themes from the interviews is provided to the interviewees in the form of this findings paper.

A second stage of data collection is planned and this paper is the main resource for that process. Participants who wish to continue in the research process can respond to this paper. Questions for reflection have been provided to assist readers to think about particular issues and how they might respond.

Participants can respond to this paper in two ways:

1. Make comments using the response sheet provided; or 2. Attend a group meeting with other interviewees, where together we will examine and test some of the thoughts proposed in this paper and collectively analyse the information to assist me in the process of answering the study's overall research questions.

There will be two groups comprised of the previously interviewed practitioners held in Melbourne and Brisbane. Teleconferencing facilities will be available at the Brisbane meeting providing access for regional and rural participants to participate in this part of the study.

At the conclusion of both group processes, further analysis of the findings from both stages will be undertaken and integrated into my final analysis in the form of the thesis.

Responding to the Paper – some questions to think about as you read

The paper covers a broad range of subject matter and therefore it may be helpful to read it with a few questions in mind.

Have I accurately interpreted specific points you made?

Does this paper reflect the major points you were making?

Are there any major components missing of what could be thought of as structural CD?

When themes have been discussed with opposing or diverse viewpoints, how do you think these points talk to each other or intersect?

How do you make sense of the contradictions?

Other questions relating to particular sections are located in the body of the paper (in text boxes).

PART 1 - CONTEXTS FOR PRACTICE, ROLES AND THE PURPOSE OF CD WORK

Participants in this study are experienced CD practitioners. A pre-requisite to participate in this research was a minimum of three years CD practice. The majority has had significant lengths of experience with some practicing for forty years. The total number of community development practice experience is 347 years.

Contexts for practice

The majority of participants undertake various forms of paid CD work. These can be defined in three ways.

1. They work with various ‘communities of interest’, such as: Sudanese Australians from refugee backgrounds; migrants; aging community members and seniors groups; young people, families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
2. Work in ‘issue-specific’ contexts, such as, community housing or working with people at risk of ill health.
3. Others work in the context of ‘place’ and work across a geographical community. This may include: a local community (suburbs or towns) or a number of local communities across a region; work from a local government authority base, or an organisation such as a peak body or University; or, across a regional network of other CD practitioners or neighbourhood houses. It was noted that CD work in these geographical contexts usually evolves into particular focus areas of interest for people living in those communities.

Some participants take their community building efforts into unpaid contexts as well. For them, CD work is seen as a vocation. As one participant put it, “in our culture we don’t have the word ‘volunteer’ in our dictionary....we help one another naturally, culturally, religiously....it is not your choice; it is a must” (V8).

Diverse roles

When asked about the role practitioners enact, the majority of responses included descriptors such as, “facilitator”, “connector”, “animator”, “mobiliser” and “networker”. There was also acknowledgment that these roles involve being a “learner” (Q6); “leading and being led” (Q2); a “researcher” (V8); and “being opportunistic....helping a group to be ready to jump into action when an opportunity arises” (V11). Moreover, the roles often include being a “responder” (Q2) to community needs as they arise, and also about “creating spaces where people can meet and incubate good ideas to be turned into action” (V1).

The purpose of CD work

The question about the main purpose of the work fell into four areas. Some participant’s focused on one or two main areas, others commented about a range of purposes to the work.

1. Several participants argued that the aim of the work is to create social change (Q2; Q7; Q8; V1) and bring about “global and social justice” (Q10); that “challenges or provides alternatives to dominant structures or processes which cause oppression” (V10).
2. Many discussed the notion that CD creates “opportunities for increased citizenship” (Q9; V8; V12), when people “have a voice” (Q8; V8) and “barriers to participation”, “employment, education, affordable housing” (Q7; Q3), are reduced.

3. For some practitioners emphasis was placed on strengthening communities (Q1; Q4; Q6; V4; V11;), to “increase the overall well-being of communities” (V5), to “prevent ill health”(V9); to be “stronger, more cohesive, resilient, viable, and capable” (V2; V3; V7). This involves “building positive relationships and connections” and “creating partnerships (Q10; V10)”. So that community members “will have the mental space to be creative people” (V12); and as a community, will have the ability to “appreciate a sense of itself....to see itself and whatever it needs to face up to” (Q2)....perhaps having the realization that, “hey, we’re it” (V1) and engage in some sort of action together.

4. And finally, going beyond just the desired outcomes from the work, participants also discussed purpose in terms of more process-oriented aspects, where CD is seen as an alternative to more traditional or dominant ways of working, like those that have ascendancy in the social services sector. Participants commented that the work aims to “equalize power relationships... often challenging the status quo” (V10). It also “provides different ways of doing democracy” (V1), where all “people’s contributions are validated” (V10) and therefore are integral to processes. Drawing on postmodern ideas were comments such as, “there are multiple ways of doing ‘community’....and “there’s more than one ‘truth’....in our thinking, behaving and relating....[in order] to change society” (V1).

The way participants discussed their work could be viewed as having both activist and community building intentions. By placing different emphasis on these aims means how problems or opportunities within communities are viewed, as well as approaches taken, differ. For instance, several people discussed that their aim was to “become redundant” (V2; V6) “render myself useless”(V11); in a sense, to create sustainable communities, those that have strength, resilience and the capacity to act, bringing about the kind of changes people wish to see in their communities. Others are always looking for the “social impacts” (Q8) and “policy implications” (V5) for communities.

How the aims of the work are achieved were discussed at length in the interviews and is the craft of the work. However, given the broad range of contexts and objectives for CD work, it is suffice to say that this work is multifaceted and complex. As one practitioner put it, “it’s like a dance...you go back and you go forward, you go sideways...the work has to be matched by the capacity of the community...and you have to be alert to the signs... but there’s no tick boxes to gauge how people are moving forward” (V11).

PART 2 – RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: How do practitioners think about structure within their work?

Q2: How do practitioners put this understanding into practice?

2.1 The Idea of ‘Structure’

The idea of ‘structure’ is discussed in the literature on community development, often though in simplistic ways, or is mystified. It is proposed that a more sophisticated and concrete outlook on structure is needed, one that can work with the complexities that exist in our contemporary and globalised society. Therefore, participants were encouraged to discuss their ideas about ‘structure’ in an exploratory way and four key points of view were expressed.

2.1.1 Structures as systems in society

Firstly, a large proportion of participants discussed structure as bureaucratic systems in society. Emphasis was placed on having an analysis of the power and resources various systems hold and how these may be used to benefit community members. However, many participants also acknowledged that bureaucratic processes and systems are often a source of oppression and reinforce disadvantage; they are, as one participant stated, “fundamentally flawed” (Q1). Bureaucracies are complex entities that often use “exclusive language” (V6), and are frequently inflexible in their rules and the manner in which organisational policies are implemented. Some practitioners attempt to assist community members to “navigate [these] systems” (Q1). Others also work to change those systems through various policy-advocacy or planning processes; or as one participant described, by finding “loop holes” (V12) in systems between stated or declared policies and “invisible” (V12) policies “that are there by innuendo or inference, which is where we CD workers have some flexibility” (V12) in effecting beneficial change.

2.1.2 Community-created structures

Secondly, some participants discussed the role of community-created and community-owned ‘structures’. Many participants discussed the importance of creating new structures, “that can drive the agendas of people who have been excluded by existing structures” (Q3). One participant said it this way, “community is essentially about ‘spirit’, which is about passion and responsibility....we need structures that will act as vehicles to nurture that spirit and responsibility” (Q10). Furthermore, others emphasised the importance of starting out in an unstructured way; “start the good idea, get things happening without going through all the formalities” (V1); “don’t move too quickly to structure something....I see the impact on how [dealing with governance matters] detracts people’s attention from what they want to achieve”... “they [the structures] become ends in themselves, not just vehicles to get things done” (Q4).

2.1.3 Structuring CD work

The third way participants discussed the idea of structure was as a verb, ‘structuring’ CD work. These can be clustered around three main points.

1. Some participants referred to structuring as various methods or approaches they undertake (Q2; Q10; Q5; V9). “Flexibility” was a key word used by the majority of participants. Structuring CD processes requires a level of flexibility to ensure outcomes are achieved, yet at the same time remain agile enough to take opportunities as they arise. As one participant put it, processes need to be “like a house where the roof is self-supporting, where you can move the walls around as the need arises, as suits the situation” (V11).

Remaining flexible is counter-balanced with another theme - the idea of structuring is to ensure “accountability” (Q6; V7); to have the ability to track progress as a piece of work unfolds (Q2); or to ensure there is practitioner “self-discipline” (V11), so that planned activities and goals are actually achieved.

2. Others talked about structuring for inclusive processes. They discussed the implications of working with groups and the inherent diversity that exists in points of view, needs and desired outcomes. Inclusive processes, “where people can come along...and are “empowered to use their creativity and ingenuity” (Q2) were seen as important aspects of structuring CD work.

3. Another view is that structuring has implications to ensure the sustainability of processes over the long term. Processes and structures are put in place and may involve “complex structuring arrangements, so the right people can be involved and have the right level of control” (Q9) essential to achieve desired outcomes.

2.1.4 Structure as a space for experimenting, holding tensions

The final way structure was discussed was about “holding the tension” between “old structures, existing ways of being...and new ones” (V1); where “new synergies are created... [and] new ways of partnering” (Q3) take place. Yet, aims such as these are not always achievable. There was an acknowledgement that this work is “an experiment”, “an exquisite balance between structure and flow – so you get really creative; you don’t get mindless; spontaneous... yet purposeful” (Q2).

Practitioners in this study are alert to the reality that there are dominant ways of thinking and working, for example, where ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ may be inevitable. However, as one practitioner contends, “every structure is a place of contest” (Q10). In CD work “we try to develop structures that create the space to maximize people’s power over their own decision-making processes, and we may try to co-operate with other groups developing their own structures...yet oppression and exploitation can occur *in every structure* and CD needs to resist processes that may “overpower people and minimize autonomy, responsibility, creativity.... community” (Q10).

2.2. Structural Disadvantage

A range of critiques from radical, socialist or structural perspectives have traditionally advocated far-reaching and fundamental changes in political, social and economic systems (Popple 1995:34). The radical critique has an analysis of the structural basis of poverty which is perpetuated by economic, political, and social structures, creating an unequal distribution of resources and power throughout society (Popple & Quinney 2002). It is not uncommon to find reference to community development practice being a vehicle to redress structural disadvantage in the literature. The questions in the interviews about structural disadvantage elicited strong and at times, contradictory responses from participants.

2.2.1 At the Heart of the Work

For many practitioners, the role CD has in relation to disadvantage is that it is its “primary focus”, “integral to it”, “fundamental” and “at the heart of the work” (Q5; Q8; V2; V5; V6; V10). For participants working with Indigenous communities in particular, comments were made such as, “in some ways CD becomes almost their *only* option...it is their shield against powerful oppressors that continue to colonise, control and manage people’s lives” (Q4). Moreover, another perspective was that CD “can’t help *but* do it [address disadvantage]...because CD is about people working together to build a better life for themselves, and their family and neighbours, and if those people are disadvantaged, then by definition a ‘better life’ is *not disadvantaged*” (Q9). Other participants referred to the current number of ‘crises’ facing communities due to “climate change, peak oil and the global economic crisis” (V10). They fear that there will be “new losers” (V10), because of the “shifting face of poverty” (Q2) and therefore CD will be working with a “vastly expanded group” (V10) who will become disadvantaged as a result.

Another concern raised here were issues around the way CD is tied to funded programs, that often come with pre-determined outcomes set by Government policy. For people who hold a strong ethos about CD addressing poverty, their concern was that “CD forgets its purpose” (Q2). “A lot of CD these days is ‘event managing’”...“requiring a discipline to keep returning to *why* you are engaging” (Q2).

2.2.2. CD is everybody – so we’ll all be advantaged

The same range of questions about disadvantage elicited a very different view from other participants that can be summed up as, “yet, CD is for everyone” (V1; V10). As one participant put it, “I think there’s a bit of a clichéd view about how CD works only with marginalized people” (V3). This ambivalence stems from the notion that CD work takes place “*across* a community” (Q2), “with well-resourced people too” (Q5). Several participants critiqued the definition of the word “disadvantage”, with one saying, “what is ‘disadvantage’ anyway....no access to love, good relationships...there is spiritual and social poverty also” (V1).

An analysis that includes a more holistic view of poverty and disadvantage occupied many participants’ thoughts. As one participant said, “I really believe that poverty is a product of the break down of relationships between people...it’s not just a matter of economics, it’s about how we *do* economics” (Q10). Another participant voiced a similar perspective arguing, “in our neighbourhood’s we’ve fragmented our contacts with each other”.... “I think we need to rebuild those” (Q7). Community development “connects people back together again”... “it doesn’t eliminate disadvantage, but it creates a context in which people now have a sense of responsibility for one another”... “they cannot abandon their responsibility to their poor brothers and sisters” (Q10). Further, putting the emphasis on the word ‘community’ in ‘community development’, as one participant stated, means that through “sharing space and time [a] gift exchange or reciprocity” (V1) will take place and “from that, sacrificing of self-interest for common interest” (V1). These arguments allude to the restoration of ‘community’ or kinship, conditions where all community members will be ‘advantaged’.

It should be noted that a number of participants raised both these differing viewpoints as integral to their ideas about structural disadvantage. They may have responded firstly that addressing structural disadvantage was central to CD, but later discussed the notion that CD is for all.

These arguments require further analysis. The later point of view, that CD is for everyone, sits within contemporary notions of social capital¹, which talks about the collective value of social networks. Yet, a critique of social capital comes from the perspective that while everyone is busy volunteering, building connections and networks, the source of oppression that subjugates individuals and groups in society will not be addressed. Processes that continue to exclude and decrease citizenship may be masked when too great an emphasis is placed on building social capital.

¹ R. Putnam, 2000

Question for reflection:

There is a strong tradition of CD that advocates our priority should always be with ‘the poorest of the poor’, however, there is a critique that by locating community development workers into low socio-economic communities (as they often are) and not working more systemically, or across communities, is ineffectual.

What are your thoughts on this?

3. Structure and Agency

Placing emphasis on the efficacy of human action, or ‘agency’ (Sewell 1992), gives rise to theories that humans as active subjects, as opposed to passive objects of politics (Shaw & Martin 2000). Hustedde & Ganowicz (2002) argue that community change agents need not be seen as powerless when faced with powerful structures, because cultural patterns can be transformed to influence or break down structural constraints that inhibit solidarity or capacity building.

Practitioners in this study had many stories to tell about the way people’s lives have been transformed as a result of community development processes. Others however, told stories where agency is seemingly less achievable. When asked about people overcoming their oppression one participant stated, “No, I’ve only been at it for seven years with Indigenous people, their history of oppression is too long” (Q6). Another participant who primarily works with refugees commented, “they may have legal citizenship, but they do not feel like they belong...they are still stereotyped and discriminated against” (V8).

To enable a sense of agency, a key theme that many participants discussed was “to create ways people can *meaningfully* participate” by “supporting people in what *they* want”. Therefore, inherent in this idea of agency is the notion that CD needs to be driven by those involved, from the grassroots. It is also about “creating spaces for relationships to develop” (Q9); and, “helping community leaders develop their own frameworks for practice” (Q4); and paradoxically at times it is about, “*not* doing something, not intervening, but “stay[ing] out of the way” (Q9). Others times it is about being quite purposeful and finding ways “to help the person be in touch with their power” (Q10).

Many ways people have been in touch with their power were discussed in the interviews. To name just a few, these included: people’s identity groups being recognized and formal spaces and organisations established; people having new ways to have a voice in matters that affect them; increased opportunities for education and employment; and people gaining resources for their communities. The end result of all these activities was that people “gained confidence”...“made new connections”...and “had support” (Q1) and these processes became “the launching pad” (Q1) for a host of activities, creating a widening sense of agency within their communities.

Question for reflection:

When asked to reflect on CD processes that have enabled people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation in the interviews, most participants told stories of individual lives being transformed. Only a few stories were told about groups of people who had benefited from CD.

Why do you think most people responded to this question this way?

4. Critical Processes that have enabled Transformation

Six main themes about critical processes that have enabled transformation were discussed in the interviews.

1. Workplace bases or spaces that are created for these processes were seen as important. As one participant said, “people need to feel that this is a place where I’m coming to connect...I’m coming to be myself in this space.....not to be ‘fixed’ by somebody” (V4). The ways practitioners organize their day was also seen as important. One practitioner commented, “it’s important to be available for unplanned (un-diarised) opportunities....when people just turn up” (V2); also, “creating an ethos about the place that when a person comes in I get away from the computer and say ‘welcome to you’ (V1). Community development processes are not necessarily lineal; meaning, can be stepped through systematically. Therefore, being prepared to work with people when they are ready to act was seen as an important strategy.

2. Making a meaningful connection with people is critical. One participant stated that the process starts with compassion for others: “She needed to believe that we were genuinely interested in helping her; listening to her; she needed to feel she could trust us....the first thing you have to feel is your compassion” (V7). This in turn leads to a sense of “hope” (Q10; V7) for community members; as people come to believe in “some possibility of making a contribution” (Q10); “a belief in themselves” (V3).

3. Many participants discussed the micro skills associated with the work. This involves “listening deeply” and “building trust”; and having “a deeper understanding of the complexity of the work” (Q2; V3; V8); “about what’s going on” (V1). Additionally, “respecting culture and being prepared to learn about it” (Q6; Q7) are seen as critical.

4. After groups have formed, the importance of “community analysis” (V1) with group members was raised. This is when people with concerns come to a shared understanding about “their common issues” (V9) - what is important to them and how to address their concerns. This creates “a sense of community” (Q10) and leads to various actions in which the group can engage. Other themes around action included the importance of finding “lots of ways people can participate” (V10) in CD processes; as well as “developing a reflective practice” (Q9, V1, V6) throughout the length of a piece of work. Three types of reflective practice were seen as critical for transformation: personal reflection for practitioners; collegial reflections if working in teams; and ongoing-shared reflection with community members as projects evolve.

5. Factors around time associated with CD processes was raised. It takes time “for ideas to germinate” (V11), and requires a certain amount of “tenacity” (V10) to keep at processes for lengths of time. One participant discussed the concept of “gently pushing” (V11) people through long-winded processes that they might find challenging. For example, gaining an educational qualification that will lead to employment or seeing extended projects through. The gentle pushing is about “seeing the potential” in people, and saying, ‘I believe in you; I believe you can’” (V11). Because the goals of the CD work are often substantial and processes to achieve them lengthy, other practitioners commented on the need to “have fun”

along the way (Q6; V3); “celebrations are important” (V2; V11) and small gains need to be acknowledged.

6. The last critical process discussed was about linking grassroots processes to “people who can help” (Q6; V10), such as “an intermediary structure, like Council...that gives the piece of work a profile....and may harness some resources” (Q5). Seen as “more strategic work” (Q2), this can have a direct effect on the intermediary structure itself. This is discussed below.

5. The Transformation of Powerful Structures

The sections above have discussed processes whereby people have had personally transformative experiences due to their involvement in community development. However, whilst all this work happens at the grassroots or whilst working at the community member / community groups level, this study is also investigating how societal structures can be transformed. Structures in our society might be imagined as located on the ‘vertical plane’ and working at the grassroots level might be imagined as on the ‘horizontal plane’. Underpinning this idea of powerful structures being transformed is the notion that they and their policies can be oppressive to individuals and various cohorts of citizens. The idea that CD work on the horizontal plane may directly influence structures on the vertical plane to address the root cause of oppression was discussed in the interviews. Four main themes emerged.

5.1 Yet to see powerful structures transformed

Several participants stated that they had yet to see powerful structures transformed, or if they had, it was “seldom” (V11) or “accidental or ad hoc” (Q9). A range of comments sum up this position, “I’ve not had that level of influence” (Q4); “I think that’s really difficult” (V5); “but something I still hope for” (V6). Comments about why influencing structures on the vertical plane is difficult included, “I think it’s something that happens at the highest levels....if someone at the top doesn’t take a specific interest, nothing will change” (V6); “messages get lost in the hierarchy” (V6); and “they [the structures] are bulky, heavy and cumbersome to move....they don’t have the agility for transformation” (V11).

5.2 Local Government transformed

Several participants told stories about processes where local government had directly been involved in CD processes in an enabling or empowering way; or where local government itself had changed as a result of a CD process. Many of these stories involved citizen advocacy processes, where the consciousness of a Councillor was raised about particular issues, or the direct input of citizens was included in the planning or visioning processes of local government. The kind of influence these processes have though is uncertain. For instance, at the conclusion of a story one participant stated, “expressed as a group those ideas have been heard and taken seriously...but, have they changed Council’s structure (?) no; have they changed the budget allocations of Council’s process (?), only incrementally; have they changed the way Councillors and the Lord Mayor think about the city (?), absolutely” (Q9).

These processes however, often “build legitimacy” (Q3) and provide “recognition” (V1) for particular groups and their views. They can also “change perceptions” (Q3) of people in power who have influence; and these are the type of changes CD practitioners are looking for

to benefit citizens and groups with whom they work. Many participants saw influencing local government as strategic CD work, summed up by one participant when he stated, “local government processes can often leverage resources and have fulcrum power as actions can connect to *council-wide* agendas” (Q9). This is significant because often CD processes are limited to the scope of councils’ social and community service departments.

When working to influence local government, or any other structures, it was seen as important to work with community members to develop a “community analysis” (Q9; V5). This is where community members’ ideas about why and how issues should be addressed are given equal weight with a “social analysis” (Q9; V5). A social analysis may be based on statistical or other forms of data or evidence, and can strengthen a community analysis around a particular concern, giving additional weight to citizen advocacy or planning processes.

5.3 Social Movements and Systemic Policy Advocacy

When responding to the questions about powerful structures being transformed other participants told stories of various campaigns that have affected social change. These national campaigns initiated by a groundswell from grassroots actions have created a more just Australian society. Campaigns mentioned were the Native Title campaign and reforms associated with the Migration Act.

Several Victorian participants discussed the state-wide infrastructure of 360 neighbourhood houses and learning centres, the 16 regional networker positions and how these link into the Victorian peak body which represents them. Over recent years several campaigns have raised the profile of and secured funding for these neighbourhood houses and regional networks. Their success has been attributed to “a combined effort involving members of neighbourhood houses and people who use services, workers, management committee members, regional networkers and the state peak body” (V4). Participant’s commented, “we made ourselves part of the introduction of serious social policy in Victoria” (V4); where it was possible to “advance neighbourhood houses’ capacity to respond to their communities” (V10). A story told of a Queensland example of this type of work involves a semi-formal network of 22 multicultural CD and policy-advocacy workers, located in peak bodies and neighbourhood centres across the state (Q1). Their efforts were able to change the way interpreter services could be accessed cost-free by migrants and refugees using government and non-government services.

In the Queensland campaign tactics involved highlighting government policy that was far behind national standards for this work, for example, “this is an absolute failure by the Government of Queensland in Access and Equity” (Q1). In the Victorian neighbourhood houses campaigns strategies involved highlighting the alignment between the state government policy *A Fairer Victoria* (Department of Planning and Community Development) and how the work of neighbourhood houses advances this policy. Therefore, a range of tactics is used when influencing government policy to bring about change, those that point out where community values align with government policy, and those that use more “shaming” (V11) tactics.

Various strategies have their advantages and disadvantages and are considered strategically by practitioners before they engage in these processes. It was clear that a number of practitioners in this study had hard-earned experience associated with the struggle for justice and equality for people affected by powerful structures. When discussing her involvement in policy

advocacy with local government, one participant commented, “it’s tricky”.... “because you want to go right to the edge and push them along with you, but you also don’t want to brake the tension wire, because if you do, they can [be] very vicious....[dispensing] retribution even” (V11).

5.4 The idea of Revolution

The community development literature alludes to the idea of revolution when it talks about processes that transform the structures of oppression that diminish people’s lives (Ledwith 2005); (see also Eade 1997 & 2003, Kenny 2002 & 2006, Ife & Tesoriero 2006, and Reisch 2005). Yet, at least three participants in this study, who grew up in times of global social activism during the 1960’s and 1970’s, discussed their ambivalence to the idea of revolution. As one participant put it, “when I started out we believed that we could opt out of the system and create an alternative that was *other* than the system....now we know all of us live *in* the system...it’s all interconnected” (Q10). These practitioners highlighted the idea that the meta narratives of revolution are gone. Small revolutions are the order of the day, with modest goals, and where “small wins” (V5, Q6,) are seen as important. Other participants commented, “a lot of stuff happens subcutaneously...in small places....these changes are creeping changes, they keep their heads low” (V1); “they fly under the radar” (V10). Rather than “smash the system” (V1) as activism from times past tried to do, activism now looks more like “evolving the alternative from the ground up”... and “as networks become denser” (V1) they create a groundswell of action to affect change and therefore, “cannot be dismissed” (V1).

Questions for reflection:

Is the notion of “a creeping revolution” the contemporary approach needed for our globalised world?

Have I got these ideas of transformation and powerful structures right?

Are there any gaps, other ideas about critical factors not mentioned?

6. Subaltern Counter Structures

If the contemporary notion of revolution is about evolving the alternative from the ground up then theories that highlight these processes can be helpful to CD. Nancy Fraser’s (1997) theory of “subaltern counter-publics” are spaces or structures where “alternative conversations” (V10) can occur; those that are inclusive of a range of opinions and counter “hegemonic” (V10) discourses that subjugate people. This is not about a group of radicals opting out or shouting at a dominant group, but as Fraser (1997:93) suggests, it is about culturally diverse publics being included into an “ever-widening public sphere”.

One participant’s comments resonated with Fraser’s theoretical standpoint when he commented, “so I don’t lead a revolution by people at the bottom trying to overthrow the people at the top”....it is about “reframing every relationship, one at a time, from hierarchical to mutual relationships...creating spaces for equals to participate....where genuine collective decision-making” can occur (Q10).

Relevant particularly to working with Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, other participants discussed going against the dominant policy trends for mainstreaming and integration. They highlighted their belief in the importance of culturally

diverse groups needing their own spaces (Q5; V5; V9), in which people feel comfortable and safe and “where culture can be kept alive” (Q4).

Another view highlighted that subaltern spaces are often where “we discuss the undiscussable” (Q2). One participant (V7) told the story of a potentially volatile situation with Muslims and non-Muslims involved in a neighbourhood house English class. Occurring after September 11, 2001, class members found it possible to have dialogue about the violence that had occurred in the USA that day. This was an ongoing piece of work that took on transformative qualities when those involved made a commitment to stay engaged in the dialogical process even though personal worldviews and values were being challenged. Subaltern structures like this example, have the potential to “liberate everybody....and help us all to be more human” (Q10). In this case, having a safe, well-supported space for people to explore their identities, challenge stereotypes, and learn from each other made this piece of work transformative.

Question for reflection:

When discussing ideas of citizenship and groups participants mainly focused on culture and identity groups.

Is class a meaningless category when thinking about identity and CD these days?

7. Structuring Work between Levels or Domains

In relation to ‘structuring work’, there is a broad-based literature whose theories are ostensibly about mobilizing and sustaining community development work.² Progressive community development theorists, whose thoughts are often shaped by a global analysis of poverty, argue for a practice that makes local and global connections; or at least a practice that is informed by a global analysis, and attempts to go beyond the local.³

7.1 The importance of seeking change at more than one level

Whether or not a practitioner attempts to go beyond the local may be due their individual frameworks for practice. As one participant commented, “I think part of it depends on the worker’s framework, so if you are doing structural community development, you are going to work for change at several different levels, and you are going to influence the democratic process (Q7). This emphasis was reiterated with comments such as, “wherever possible I try to look at some policy direction to see if I can influence that” (V5); and, “the vision is to structure it up and make it more powerful than keeping it at the margins....more visibility, more capacity [to affect change] at other levels” (Q5).

² For example: Batten & Batten 1988; Henderson & Thomas 2002; Kahn 1994; Kenny 2006; O'Regan & O'Connor 1989; Thomas 1976; Twelvetrees 1991. Much of this literature discusses work based in local communities.

³ **Educational influences**

The questions asked in the interviews on the topic of structuring work elicited a range of viewpoints. Although this study was not aiming to undertake comparative research between the practice approaches of Queenslanders and Victorians, responses to this subject matter on structuring did vary between the two states. The majority of Queensland participants have been trained at the University of Queensland (UQ) in a particular tradition of CD practice (see for example, Kelly 2008; Westoby & Owen 2009; and Lathouras, forthcoming), and this did have a bearing on their responses. Other non-UQ trained Queensland participants and the Victorian participants come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds (eg undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications in Social Work, CD, Social Science & Humanities; Education; Business; and Public Health. However, this aside, it was noted that differing approaches to structuring CD work were unique to each practitioner.

7.2 Broad range of approaches

How structuring takes place included many stories about forming networks or “consortiums of networks” (V12) and partnerships (V2, V3, V4, Q9); forming references groups to inform particular pieces of work (Q7; Q8; V8; V9); and hosting social policy and practice forums to raise issues and develop collective analysis about responses to these (Q8; Q9; V2; V8). Two participants discussed developing “strategic alliances” with the business and corporate sectors to bring about change (Q3; Q8). Others discussed the organisational structural arrangements necessary to have the freedom to enact the vision for a piece of work, whilst having legal and financial security to complete that work (Q4; Q9; Q10; V1).

PART 3 – RESEARCH QUESTION

Q3: What opportunities, issues and challenges do practitioners face when they put this into practice?

8. Challenges with structuring

Four main themes emerged when discussing challenges for structuring CD work.

1. Lack of processes and models to go beyond the local level. Several participants discussed that they used a more “intuitive” (V2; V3; V6) approach to their CD work and “without models” (V6) or “a clear process” (Q1) to engage in, this type of work can be difficult. Another commented, “structuring is always part of every process, but we rarely do it well enough” (Q9). And another commented, “it’s really complex work.....and support for workers to engage in this type of practice is lacking” (Q5). “We don’t have good mentoring systems in place for community work practitioners” (Q5), and this can leave workers feeling like the work is too “risky” having “no confidence to ‘give it a go’” (Q5).
2. Finding leadership to engage in collective citizen advocacy. Others discussed the challenges associated with “finding leadership” among community members (Q8; V5), “people who can think more strategically” (V5) and who will be willing to work towards change at more systemic levels. Practitioners may join with community members to engage in this kind of work, but as one participant commented, “you’ll always get a few ‘in there’ community members who have that passion and motivation....but it’s so much work [for them]...and the process doesn’t mean that it will actually influence decisions....we hope so, but it’s not guaranteed” (Q1).

This lack of certainty about assured outcomes was repeated, and seemed to reflect an aspiration about the *potential* of the work. For example, one participant working with Indigenous people to reclaim their land discussed the very long-winded process people are going through with the state government. They have engaged in a “series of small steps...won some battles and lost some...and are currently having a breather before fighting again” (Q4). Aspirations like these were common, for instance when participants said: “what may be a small success for change today, is potentially the thing that creates the capacity for substantial change down the track” (V10). And, “the challenge is knowing, something like long-term change or structural change, for instance looking at

federal government policy when you're a local government worker, and *knowing* how your day-to-day action might contribute towards change" (V12).

3. Sustaining partnerships. Some participants discussed the challenges associated with partnering with other organisations over the long-term, particularly when key workers move out of a partner organisation. Tools like Memorandum's of Understanding and strategic planning processes are used to create shared values and goals however using these tools does not necessarily ensure these are sustained (Q8). Many participants placed emphasis on three critical factors to sustain long-term CD processes: attending to relationships; ensuring there is an on-going collective analysis amongst key players; and maintaining an on-going commitment to co-operation.
4. Policy and planning infrastructure. Another contrast that emerged between the two states was the quantity of policy and planning infrastructure that is available to practitioners to affect change around particular issues. Particularly in the neighbourhood house sector, but in other sectors as well, Victorian planning processes seem to have placed emphasis on building a layer of infrastructure that can connect local needs and infrastructure with government policy or peak body infrastructure. A Queenslander's perspective is, "I don't think we've had strong policy debates at a community-sector level around a lot of issues...we don't create the right spaces for them....and we are good at 'patching things up', making them work 'well enough'" (Q5). "We put people's needs before structural change processes....we're spread too thinly to work at both ends and we make the choice to support people and then we are left with the structures not really shifting (Q5). This sentiment about focusing on people's immediate needs rather than structural change was echoed by a rural Victorian participant when he said, "let's have some ambitious aims, instead of trying to scrape by...which in the end is just disadvantaging people constantly....practitioners need to get their voice heard, but it's too tempting to say, 'oh, I'll help this person today' instead of, 'I'll voice my opinion in this forum', where I don't know if it will make a difference" (V12).

Question for reflection:

Structuring beyond the local is seen as critical, yet what will make a difference to ensure its effectiveness?

9. Barriers to Transformation and Other Challenges for Practice

In addition to challenges related to structuring CD work, a host of other concerns were raised in the interviews, either about barriers community members face, individually or collectively; or challenges practitioners face when attempting to bring about social change. These can be clustered into four areas and the key themes that emerged are discussed.

9.1 Societal hegemony and colonisation

Societal hegemony is a major barrier that “works towards maintaining the status quo” (Q5; V10), perpetuating the belief that there are winners and losers in every society and therefore *not* attaining equality in terms of participation in civil society is acceptable, the norm. Structures, policies and processes that reinforce disadvantage, that subjugate groups of people and continue to “colonise” (Q2; Q4; Q6; V12) both people and “community space” (Q10; V4) permeate, and these are the backdrops for CD practice.

The overall impact of colonization, “treating people like clients” (Q10), is that “people give up on themselves” (V11); “it pacifies people” (Q4) and “they lose hope” (V11). Facing multiple barriers to civil participation reduces people’s abilities to even have awareness “that change can happen” (Q5; Q8), that their lives could be improved. Many barriers to civil participation were discussed including, “language barriers” and “access to services” (Q1; V5; V8; V9), as well as the impact of racism (Q1) and the media’s stereotyping of cultural groups (V8), to name just a few.

9.2 Government social policy and the impact on the sector

As the majority of practitioners in this study currently work in the funded social services sector, engaging in CD work in this context raised significant issues.

Political imperatives over social imperatives

1. “Short political cycles” (Q5) tend to emphasise short-term goals, and “centralised policy making” (Q3) processes tend to be “inflexible” (Q6) to local needs and conditions. This “one size fits all” (Q3) mentality runs counter to the fundamental principles of “responsiveness”, being “flexible”, and tailoring processes to suit the needs of the people involved in CD processes. These themes were repeatedly raised throughout the interviews.

Implications for NGO’s who enter into contractual arrangements with government

2. Funded CD programs are “outcomes focused” (V10), often with “unrealistic milestones and expectations” (Q2), and designed by “policy makers who don’t understand what community building is really about” (V12). This creates many barriers for CD workers in their desire to take the time it requires to adequately engage in processes they believe are required for people-led social change to occur.

3. Issues about short-term funding for CD work were discussed by many participants, with some questioning why CD is seen differently from other types of human services that are funded in an ongoing fashion. The ‘sustainability’ ethos that is often tagged with CD work, as well as the ‘we aim to do ourselves out of a job’ viewpoint often inherent to capacity-building approaches, feeds into and may contribute to justifications by Government for funding short-term CD projects.

4. Other concerns about government funding were raised. Some felt that more money was needed for them to do their work appropriately (V2; V3; V9). Yet, another participant

worries that community organisations are becoming “dependant on government funding” (V1), leaving them open to being controlled or thought of as quasi-government organisations. Participants echoed this sentiment when they made comments such as, “increasingly, organisations take the definitions of what and who they are from the Department” (Q2); and, “[over the years] the edge of critique seems to have been washed away” (V12); “anything with a radical edge is discouraged” (V10).

5. The “increasing levels of accountability around government contract management” (Q5) was another theme causing concern to many participants. One participant told a story of her request for support and flexibility around deadlines when she was addressing a newly introduced accountability process. She commented, [the department officer] “behaved like a zombie gaoler....just saying in this automaton way, ‘well that’s how it is’....they aren’t community resource officers, they’re community compliance officers” (Q2).

The work is not understood or valued

6. Another theme raised by many participants was the fact that CD is not understood or valued. Several participants referred to line managers or management committee’s not understanding the purpose and methods of CD work (Q7; Q8; V2). A different perspective was that CD practitioners themselves do a disservice to the practice when they only “talk about warm and fuzzy things” (V7). They may not have a clear language or analysis to communicate the benefits of their work to a range of audiences, such as funding bodies.

7. Many participants critiqued the dominance of a service delivery or “welfare” culture” (V7). ““Doing for’ gets in the way of development” (V11); as does the “professionalization” (Q9) of the sector, where professionals “take over” (Q2), or “impose their view” (V9) and also where people are ““done to’....it destroys trust” (V2). These types of processes may be employed in a worker’s desire to meet prescribed outcomes laid down by social policy or organisational imperatives.

8. Other concerns about the lack of research (Q5) in CD, and poor evaluation tools and mechanisms (Q5; V4; V10) were raised. One participant commented that even if a piece of work is evaluated rigorously and proven to have effective outcomes, this does not necessarily translate into securing funding for current or future projects (Q9). Lack of research and poor evaluation processes mean that it is difficult for practitioners to provide the evidence they need to substantiate claims about the effectiveness of CD (Q5; V5; V9).

Human resource management

9. The final sector-related concerns were made with regard to human resource management issues. In Queensland many CD practitioner roles have “dual responsibilities”, including coordination of centres and programs, line-management responsibilities and administrative functions, in addition to their community building roles (Q2; Q5; Q8; Q9). This means emphasis is often given to priorities other than CD work. In Victoria a trend to replace neighbourhood CD workers with ‘administrators’ or ‘facility managers’ was raised (V4; V10). These practitioners stated that this trend is taking place because of the increased accountabilities of contract management and risk management priorities.

10. Others raised their concern about the part-time status of their roles (Q2; Q6; V3) and because of heavy workloads feel obligated to work beyond paid hours. A final concern was with the “out-migration” (V10) of experienced CD practitioners to government or other positions due to “low wages” (V3; V10) and the loss of skills and knowledge this is having within the non-government sector.

9.3 CD practitioner skills and practice

Lack of skills and practice experience in general was another strong theme in the interviews. There is a “lack of understanding” (V4) about the aims of the work; and “lack of good training and mentoring” (Q5) for practitioners. So much so one practitioner fears, “we’re in danger of losing what community work is about in terms of it’s structural change capacity....we’ll lose that aspect of the work; we’ll lose people’s vision of it’s potential or even have an aspiration *at all* around it” (Q5). A complementary perspective included the concern about CD ‘fads’, “like Assets Based Community Development”, can be “disempowering” if practitioners do not have an understanding of “first principles”, but apply methods “straight out of the textbook” (V10). The uncritical application of methods has the potential to further marginalize members of the community and inexperienced practitioners without mentors or line-managers who understand the work, can inadvertently fall into these traps.

Another concern relates to the idea that social justice is about elevating whole communities; and changing the life chances of large numbers of people, not just individuals (Healy 2005:177; Ife & Tesoriero 2006:20; Mullaly 2002:32). The perspective that CD has lost this emphasis, being satisfied “when only one or two” community members “move forward” (V11) was raised and seen a product of the dominant neo-liberal, individualised view of society that permeates the sector.

Work in local government contexts has a different set of constraints. All the local government practitioners discussed their concerns with the bureaucratic processes they are compelled to use, often requiring them to be constantly brokering or bridging community needs with the systems of local government. One participant explained that these brokering processes are necessary to ensure the community’s “voice is translated with it’s own accent and meaning to the organisation....so the city becomes a better place for everyone to live in and they [all community members] benefit from everything Council has to offer” (Q9).

A final concern raised relates to practitioners working appropriately in cross-cultural contexts (Q2; Q6; V8; V12). They emphasised the need to develop a true understanding of people’s concerns and needs. One participant commented that “we lack subtlety” requiring practitioners to ask, “how do we work respectfully and appropriately....specifically with what people are needing” (Q2), therefore ensuring worker agendas do not dominate. Having an awareness of how practice is shaped by practitioners’ own values, worldviews and aspirations for a piece of work are important factors for ensuring culturally appropriate approaches.

9.4 The personal costs associated with practitioner activism

A number of participants discussed the costs CD work can have on them personally. Practitioners stated, “you’ve got to be in to change it” (V12), and it often involves “acts of subversion” (Q1; Q10). Yet personally sustaining oneself for the long haul, particularly through long-term processes can be taxing. Some practitioners commented on their experience of poor health associated with their activism against oppression in society. Pragmatic responses to these and other personal costs associated with the work can be summarized by the comments, “you become aware of the time and energy change takes...so you pick your battles” (Q1; V10) and, “you look for small wins” “gains” or “shifts” (Q5; Q7; V4; V5); “its an incremental process” (Q7).

10. Opportunities

Despite the many barriers and challenges CD practitioners face in their daily work, those in this study are positive-minded, hopeful and pro-active change agents. One practitioner summed it up by saying, “to quote Pablo Neruda, the Latin American poet, ‘they can cut down the flowers but they can never stop the coming of the Spring’...that’s what excites me, even though we are faced with overwhelming odds, even though we fight many battles and loose most of them, there’s this eruption of the human spirit....that wants to grow, wants to change...I just see it in people” (Q10).

Several participants discussed the opportunistic nature of CD. For individuals and groups CD provides opportunities for “growth” (V7; V8) and “it transforms people’s lives” (V4). People start to see “they are able to do something for themselves” (V3), and they can “have control over their lives” (Q7). One participant summed it up by saying, “it’s the promise and the possibilities that things can happen, you *can* make a difference, that’s always exciting” (V7). Others discussed the notion of the “ripple effects” (Q8) of processes that lead to new ventures and opportunities; how the “diversity of member’s knowledge” (V9) creates collective wisdom about how to create change. Another commented, “what always excites me is the creativity [associated with the work]...it’s so nourishing” (Q3).

These types of opportunities for individual and group empowerment above were discussed, as well as other types of opportunities for CD work in general and for the CD sector.

10.1 A new epoch

Several participants commented on this period in history, being an epoch where “structural change is inevitable” (V10). “There seems to be some kind of, if not convergence, but some kind of listening to one another again about the need for other ways of living together like co-housing, like local economies, different forms of organizing” (V1); and thinking about things “that will be sustainable in a range of dimensions, ecologically, socially and economically” (V10). Another discussed his anticipation “about the possibilities of a future that’s run by [our current] young people....they wouldn’t know what community development means, but they live it and make it part of their daily lives...whether advocating for climate justice or organizing a reggae event, things like that” (Q9).

Others commented about this time in history being where “the ‘alternative’ is not so alternative anymore” (V1); “I think all those movements of people, simplifying their lives, really thinking about what matters....considering the wonder of ordinary life, *that* is what CD is about” (Q2). Others echoed this sentiment, “we encourage people to realise their aspirations, we include them in our common life” (Q10). Another discussed that “The Commons were lost 500 years ago when Europeans invaded the world” (V1), these ideas of collectivity need to be reclaimed.

10.2 What makes change happen

For one participant, change happens by having “an analysis of power and using CD to politicize processes....and by providing multiple pathways for people to participate in these processes” (V10). Another perspective was, “you have to address it at both ends, at the community building practice end and the policy reform or development end” (V11). Echoing

this sentiment, another participant discussed the notion of “untouched business” (V8); meaning that a systems-wide approach to development is required to bring about substantial change and this is largely left “untouched”.

Other comments placed emphasis on collegial relationships, “fellow travelers” (V11), who are “like-minded, which first gives you strength, but then leads to the creation of networks with people who might be influential or strategic...you can only do these things [structural change] together” (V12). In the same vein, another comment was, “we need more structural CD workers and then we may get there” (V5).

Other participants placed emphasis on building new kinds of structures, those that provide alternatives to dominant ways of doing business. With like-minded people, “collectives of organisations” (Q5) look for possibilities and “really make a difference” (Q5); and, “thinking organizationally, it is about developing new models which create connectivity, where we celebrate ‘overlap’ rather than the ‘niche’”. “There is a problem with niches and uniqueness, because it separates you from everyone else...we are much more interested in [identifying] what is our *common* base, our overlap...individualism, niche-creation is the best way for those who govern to divide and rule” (V1).

Question for reflection:

Ideas discussed about opportunities for structural CD tended to be largely aspirational in nature.

How can these aspirations be moved to concrete action?

Conclusion

Community development is almost universally understood as a healthy phenomenon, leading to greater social justice and the extension of participatory democracy (Miller & Ahmad 1997). Susan Kenny (2002) discusses what she calls the central challenge for community development - to identify effective strategies, globally as well as nationally and locally to maintain the purpose of community development in the new and complex contexts we encounter in contemporary society. The participants in this study are doing just that.

Questions for reflection:

Structural dimensions of community development practice are complex and multi-faced.

Having read this paper, what are the critical issues you identify that help or hinder the type of practice being discussed?

Are there some normative processes that should be engaged in to give practitioners some assurance about achieving desired outcomes?

What are your top two or three tips for action?

Legend – CD Contexts of Practitioners

	Queensland CD practitioners	Years of experience		Victorian CD practitioners	Years of experience
Q1	Regional / Geographic / CALD / NGO	4	V1	Urban / Geographic / NGO	43
Q2	Regional / Geographic / NGO	15	V2	Urban / CALD / Indigenous / NGO	3
Q3	Regional / Housing / NGO	28	V3	Urban / Geographic / NGO	10
Q4	Rural / Indigenous / NGO	16	V4	Urban / Network / NGO	15
Q5	Urban / Geographic / NGO	30	V5	Urban / Network / Local Govt	10
Q6	Urban / Indigenous / NGO	7	V6	Urban / CALD / Local Govt	5
Q7	Urban / Aging / Peak Body	17	V7	Urban / Geographic / Local Govt	11
Q8	Regional / Geographic / NGO	4	V8	Urban / CALD / Indigenous	10
Q9	Urban / Youth / Local Govt	23	V9	Urban / Health / University	5
Q10	Urban / Geographic / Network	38	V10	Rural / Network / NGO	12
			V11	Urban / Geographic / NGO	34
			V12	Rural / CALD / Local Govt	7

Categories:

Urban, Regional or Rural

Geographic (generalist, whole-of-community)

Focus on particular groups of community members eg CALD, indigenous, youth, aging, or network of other practitioners / neighbourhood houses

Issue specific – eg health, housing

Organisational base – eg non-Government organisation (eg co-operative, CD association, neighbourhood centre, or larger state-wide or national NGO with a locality focus); local government; peak body or university

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Questions for Reflection

Have I accurately interpreted specific points you made? Does this paper reflect the major points you were making? Are there any major components missing of what could be thought of as structural CD?

When themes have been discussed with opposing or diverse viewpoints, how do you think these points talk to each other or intersect? How do you make sense of the contradictions?

There is a strong tradition of CD that advocates our priority should always be with ‘the poorest of the poor’, however, there is a critique that by locating community development workers into low socio-economic communities (as they often are) and not working more systemically, or across communities, is ineffectual. *What are your thoughts on this?*

When asked to reflect on CD processes that have enabled people to overcome their disadvantages or marginalisation in the interviews, most participants told stories of individual lives being transformed. Only a few stories were told about groups of people who had benefited from CD. *Why do you think most people responded to this question this way?*

Is the notion of “a creeping revolution” the contemporary approach needed for our globalised world? Have I got these ideas of transformation and powerful structures right? Are there any gaps, other ideas about critical factors not mentioned?

When discussing ideas of citizenship and groups participants mainly focused on culture and identity groups. *Is class a meaningless category when thinking about identity and CD these days?*

Structuring beyond the local is seen as critical, yet what will make a difference to ensure its effectiveness?

Ideas discussed about opportunities for structural CD tended to be largely aspirational in nature. *How can these aspirations be moved to concrete action?*

Structural dimensions of community development practice are complex and multi-faced. *Having read this paper, what are the critical issues you identify that help or hinder the type of practice being discussed?*

Are there some normative processes that should be engaged in to give practitioners some assurance about achieving desired outcomes?

What are your top two or three tips for action?

Appendix 8, Example of a Tree Node

How do practitioners think about structure?

