
Charles Darwin University

Reflecting on Social Work Practice in the Northern Territory, Australia*

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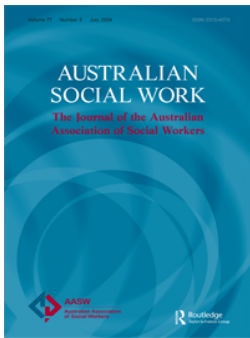
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Reflecting on Social Work Practice in the Northern Territory, Australia*

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ABSTRACT

At the core of practice for many non-Indigenous Australian social workers is learning how to work in deeply respectful, culturally appropriate ways alongside First Nations Peoples. Larrakia and Warumungu woman, and Northern Territory social work scholar, Dr Christine/Karen King's (2011) writings provided the impetus for this inquiry. King (2011) invites social workers to critically reflect on their practice and worldviews. Responding to this invitation, 10 non-Indigenous social workers with policy, academic, and/or practice experience conducted a co-operative inquiry into the question "What have we learnt about practising social work in the Northern Territory, Australia?" We explored the uniqueness of the Northern Territory and identified three interwoven themes. The first theme grounds our practice to Place—on Country. Here, we identified the importance of engaging with the diverse histories of the Peoples we work alongside. Second, we reflected on our vulnerability as social workers and explored the limitations of our professional knowledge base for working with First Nations Peoples. The third theme relates to the importance of engaging with First Nations Peoples' worldviews. We conclude by affirming the importance of social work practice being led by First Nations People on Country.

IMPLICATIONS

- Social workers working in the Northern Territory alongside First Nations Peoples will benefit from engaging with vulnerability, reflexivity, and critical reflection on their values, understandings, language, and unexamined aspects of practice and cultural self.
- Social workers in the Northern Territory need to commit to

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*All of these authors are located on the lands in parentheses after their names. They are not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

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ongoing learning and ground their practice with First Nations' worldviews and wisdom.

We, the authors, respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Lands that we all work and live on, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present, their ancestors, and their families. We extend our respect and gratitude to all First Australians who have taught us with patience and generosity. In this article, we respectfully refer to the First Peoples of Australia as First Nations Peoples (except when quoting others; then we adopt their language).

Larrakia and Warumungu woman, Elder and social work scholar Dr. King (also known as Dr. Fejo-King) (2011), who has made significant contributions to social work practices and academia, invites all social workers to critically self-reflect on their worldviews and positionality, and to reflexively decolonise self, practices, and knowledge. King's (2011) scholarship encourages the questioning of mainstream knowledge that shapes our practice and relationships with "people" and "place". Her words inspired and guided us as we embarked on our reflexive co-operative inquiry into the research question "What have we learnt about practising social work in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia?"

In addressing this question, we presented our experiences and learnings of social work practice in the NT. We contend that practice in these remote and very remote locations, as categorised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023), needs to occur in response to First Nations Peoples and Country and be informed by First Nations scholarship. According to *AASW Practice Standards* (2023, p. 8) in order to promote social justice, social workers need to actively challenge "the impact of colonisation, institutional racism and how the history and power of social workers as part of the system may be perceived and experienced".

Further, in this article, we acknowledge and explore the authors' self-doubt associated with being non-Indigenous and what this means for our social work practice. The lands within the Northern Territory, Australia, are rich in history, story, knowledge, and interconnectedness between peoples. Sharing our experiences of our work on these breathtaking and mesmerising lands caused us to travel into challenging, unexpected, and vulnerable places within.

Social Work Practice in the Northern Territory: A Unique Place

In this inquiry, we debated whether to use the term "unique" to describe our practice in the NT. It is not the practice that is unique per se; rather, it is the place that is unique and the practice is responsive to this context. Living and working experiences in the NT are different from experiences in other parts of Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) classifies the entirety of the NT, including the city of Darwin, as remote and very remote. The NT is vast, comprising 17.5% of the total Australian land mass (Australian Government & Geoscience Australia, 2023), with arid desert and tropical lands and only 233,000 or 1% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021, 2022). This vastness complicates travel and access to remote locations (NT Worksafe, 2022).

Two dominant viewpoints exist regarding remoteness. If policymakers were to stand in Canberra and look towards Kalkarindji, for example, then Kalkarindji is very remote. However, if that person stood in Kalkarindji and looked towards Canberra, then it is Canberra that is very remote. Hence, classifications such as *remote* can be considered metrocentric colonial constructs (Roberts & Guenther, 2021). Further, the geographical area called the Northern Territory (NT) is a colonial construct that does not reflect the many Nations that overlap State and Territory borders. These two examples draw attention to colonial policies, legislation, and practices that lead to people not seeing First Nations concepts (King, 2011, pp. 185–201). Additionally, terms like *very remote* appear ironic when practice necessitates proximity and relationships with First Nations Peoples. King's (2011) scholarship calls us to continually question whiteness, such as the stereotyping and wilful blindness embedded in social work theory and education (p. 214).

First Nations Peoples represent over 30% of the NT population, as compared to 3.3% of the total Australian population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022). The Northern Territory Government (2019) reports that over 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects are spoken. We hear different languages spoken every day in the NT recognising that English is often a 3rd or 4th language spoken by First Nations Peoples. In 2021, 76,487 Indigenous people (ABS, 2021) lived in over 550 remote communities, homelands, and outstations (Northern Territory Government, 2023). Furthermore, the proportion of First Nations Peoples increases as the distance from major cities increases, with First Nations populations in very remote areas of the NT as high as 74.8% (ABS, 2016). Therefore, working with First Nations Peoples necessitates travelling long distances.

Our critical review of the literature indicated a paucity of scholarship regarding social work in the Northern Territory. The exception is the social worker Dr King's (2011) research, which helped us sharpen our reflections and define and critique the concepts of remote and very remote for this article. This paucity is not surprising considering that only 1.1% of 35,000 (385) of all Australian social workers are employed in government and non-government organisations in designated NT social work practice and policy roles (Australian Government, 2023).

Methodology

We, the authors, were interested in reflecting on and capturing social work practice in the Northern Territory. In response, we formed a writing group. As we examined our experiences, discussions centred on the ongoing nature of decolonising practice and the need to learn from and be led by Indigenist scholarship and the First Nations Peoples we work alongside (Bennett & Morse, 2023; Muller, 2023; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022). We adopted co-operative inquiry as it is a participatory and inclusive methodology, supporting the cocreation, codesign and coparticipation of the research. The co-operative inquiry approach, which was pioneered by Heron and Reason (2001), is qualitative and collaborative; it values shared power and respects the experience of all group members as equal. In an inquiry, every person engages, such as coresearchers and coauthors (Reason & Heron, 1995). Co-operative inquiry encourages the sharing of knowledge publicly with peers (Short, 2018) in the hope it will encourage more people to do

the same. The authors generated the information presented from our own knowledge and available literature. Further, in keeping with this methodology, first-person voice is utilised.

The Authors' Positionality and Characteristics

We are a group of 10 non-Indigenous people, all qualified social workers with Anglo-Saxon, Australian-Lebanese, German, Irish, English, Italian or Scottish backgrounds. We recognise that we experience the privileges associated with our heritage. Nine of us are located in the NT and one in Canberra. All of us, except one, are members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), and four of us have NT AASW Branch positions.

Together, we have over 190 years of experience in social work. Some of us bring years of experience and accumulated practice wisdom in the NT, while others have less experience but bring a fresh perspective and new insights. Our practice experiences are in academia, couple and family therapy, and in the areas of drug and alcohol, mental health, health and ageing, child protection, disability, clinical supervision, bereavement, income support, community programmes, management, and leadership. Nine of us have collectively 66 years of living and working in the NT in a range of practice contexts for private, government, and nongovernment organisations in designated and non-designated social work roles. Many of us have worked directly with First Nations Peoples on Anmatyere, Arrernte, Guridnji, Jawoyn, Larrakia, Ngaanyatjarra, Ngaliwurra, Ngarinman, Nungali, Pitjantjatjara, Warumungu, Yankunytjatjara, and Yolngu Countries.

As social workers in the NT, we are acutely aware of colonial history and the role that social work has played in implementing harmful practices. We are inspired by Dr King's (2011) doctoral thesis, which focuses on the Aboriginal kinship system and social work. We agree with her research findings, including that social workers need a greater depth of understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing (King, 2011; Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003). Additionally, we recognise that many people are actively seeking to decolonise education and build cultural responsiveness, and we see this inquiry as an extension of this imperative into the field (Mlcek, 2014). This inquiry is part of our personal responsibility as social workers to try to decolonise ourselves and become culturally responsive (Bennett & Morse, 2023; Green et al., 2016).

Research Background and Design

This project arose from a World Social Work Day presentation hosted by the NT AASW Branch in 2023, which is available on the AASW website. The speakers from Katherine highlighted their experiences of working in remote communities in the NT. After consultations with academics and NT social workers, a proposal was developed, supported by the NT AASW Branch, and funded by the AASW. We invited Canberra-based Charles Sturt University (CSU) colleague Dr Monica Short to facilitate sessions that elevated the voices of social workers who wished to write about their practice in the NT.

Information and an invitation were distributed through local communication channels. As we are located vast distances apart, we met weekly via video conferencing. Our sessions were recorded to keep people who wanted to be involved engaged but

may have been travelling for work or were in locations without internet access. Early in the project, the group decided to pivot the project to a codesigned and coauthored one, thereby learning about the co-operative inquiry research methodology and collectively collaborating to coauthor this article.

Co-operative inquiry is a collaborative, participatory, and iterative process, and involves cycling through four phases (Heron & Reason, 2001, pp. 169–170). Figure 1 presents the inquiry phases.

Phase 1: Establishing the Inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001)

In this phase, we shared the challenges of working in the NT. Initially, we came together for 10 sessions led by the CSU academic, Dr Monica Short, who helped us structure our research. A shared document we could all access was created to record our (the authors’) streams of consciousness, summaries of helpful references, comments, narratives, and the minutes of our meetings: all of this we critically reflected upon and reported below. Consistent in First Nations approaches, we developed respectful and responsive relationships through listening carefully to one another (Bennett & Morse, 2023).

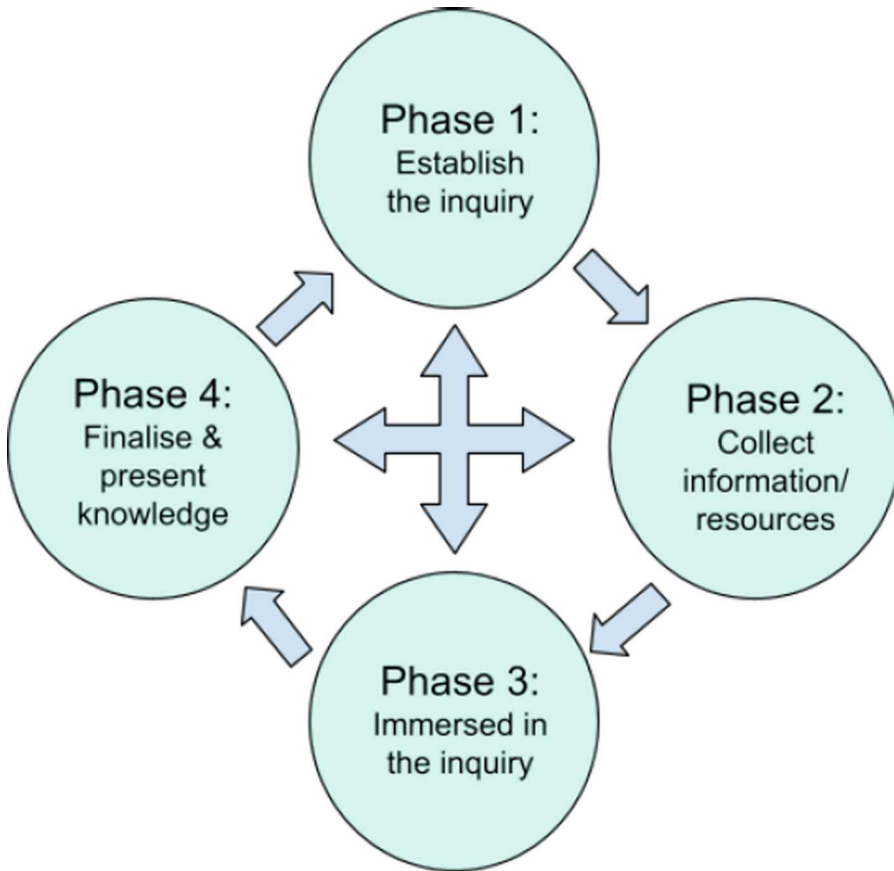


Figure 1. The four phases of co-operative inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2001; INCIq, 2024).

Phase 2: Collecting information and resources and sharing experiences (Heron & Reason, 2001)

Once we agreed on the question, we explored the literature to ascertain what is already known about social work within the NT and compared it to our practice experience and vice versa. The review revealed minimal content on our topic. We captured our own experiences and learnings deciding that this article would be written from our social work perspective.

Phase 3: Immersion (Heron & Reason, 2001)

Collectively, we reviewed and discussed the material gathered, with all contributing to the concepts shared. To help ensure qualitative rigour, First Nations scholarship informed our approach (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022) and this literature was integrated into our inquiry. We analysed our narratives and reflections manually and through NVivo for recurring themes. We applied a retroductive thematic analysis approach which, as Craig and Bigby (2015) explained, involves the continual moving between the literature and our reflections on practice until the key themes emerged.

Phase 4: Reflect on Actions, Finalise the Inquiry, and Propose and Present Knowledge (Heron & Reason, 2001)

In the final phase of the co-operative inquiry process, we all revisited our reflections. Collectively, we kept meeting until we had fully reviewed and refined the structure and content of this article to ensure it accurately captured our collective knowledge and addressed the research question. In total, we met weekly over 24 weeks during 2023 and forged strong collegial relationships.

Findings

We identified three interwoven themes apparent in our practice.

Theme 1: Grounding Our Practice to Place

Our inquiry conversations emphasised the importance of listening to one another and learning the diverse histories of the First Nations Peoples we work alongside (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022). Federal and Territory policies and legislation tend to encourage individualism that directly impact our practice environments, relationships, and approach (King, 2011). We agreed unconscious bias and racism are prevalent within many structures and institutions and often assume that the same operating conditions exist universally; for example, the belief that all people have readily available proof of identity, electronic connectivity, and accessibility to mail. However, we discussed how these assumptions can be oppressive and prevent some First Nations Peoples from choosing to exercise their rights as citizens of Australia (Moularadellis, 2021). The entrenched economic disadvantage, oppressive policies, and structural racism reverberate through social work practice on Country.

Practising on Country

We shared our thoughts about how the broader context of our Northern Territory practice and the history of mandated requirements manifests in the distrust, fear, and intergenerational trauma experienced by First Nations Peoples (Bennett & Gates, 2021; Darwin et al., 2023). As social workers committed to social justice, we witness the ongoing social disadvantages of ill-conceived historical and contemporary policies and legislation. In response, we experience strong reactions, from paralysis to outrage. However, we also acknowledge that being grounded with People on Country enables us to recognise the strengths that often are unseen by non-Indigenous people. There is a rich diversity of culture, protocols, language, geography, climate, and infrastructure within different Countries. Responding to this diversity is essential to our practice.

Many of us practice in isolated contexts and may be the only social worker on Country. It is not unusual for lone social workers in the NT to experience isolation and spend short or extended visits in small communities, reached by small aircraft or driving long distances on unsealed roads. Emily noted, “Social work practice can be isolating. You may be the only social worker in the community for that week or other extended amount of time; your closest social work colleague may be several hours away (if you have one).”

We recognised that planning travel contingencies is critical (ensuring sufficient water, spare parts, rope, satellite phone, extra fuel, and spare tyres). Plans can change quickly due to staff shortages in the context of high workforce turnover, cultural ceremonies, and weather. We reflected on how these sudden changes are often out of our control, requiring patience and a persistent commitment to continue showing up. What is in our control is our ongoing responsiveness to context, reflective and reflexive practice, and a commitment to social justice and working alongside First Nations Peoples.

Theme 2: Embracing Vulnerability in Our Practice

Vulnerability is common in our diverse experiences of practice. The NT practice context leads us to have more questions than answers. Two examples are what are our internalised dominant and oppressive worldviews, and how does our practice and presence continue to perpetuate the oppression of First Nations Peoples?

In this inquiry, we explored how critical reflection involves awareness of power relationships (Beddoe & Davys, 2016) and requires a questioning standpoint (Bennett & Morse, 2023). Reflecting on our worldview and how decolonising our practice can leave us feeling vulnerable, Sophie expressed this as “Practising as a social worker in the NT as a non-Indigenous person, working cross-culturally, requires a deeper examination or even an excavation of the self”. Further to Sophie’s point, one aspect of social work as a profession is the purposeful use of self. Yet, if that self comes to practice unaware, is it possible that the very notion of being purposeful is in itself a white construct? Such reflections can be challenging, uncomfortable, and immobilising. We need to be open to experiencing the discomfort of not knowing. Frances captures this vulnerability and a striving for humility:

The unlearning and relearning processes occurring when working alongside First Nations People is a part of decolonising social work practice. This is something that takes a lot of

vulnerability by admitting to oneself that you often don't hold the required knowledge. This also means acknowledging that what you do know is frequently not right.

For us, critical reflection assists with prioritising respect for the people we work alongside, respect for Peoples and Country. Emily adds to the idea:

Comfort is seeking to rest one's identity and practice in the concept of knowing; however, as social workers, we seek to sit in discomfort and vulnerability, embracing not knowing and unlearning. To start, we ground ourselves in recognising the where, who, and how we are in connection and relation to others and place.

We consider that sitting with our vulnerability is central for practice in the NT. Embracing the vulnerability of not knowing, while uncomfortable, presents us with a tremendous opportunity to unlearn, learn, and relearn and thereby centre our practice in relational ways of being.

Theme 3: Centring and Listening to First Nations Peoples' Worldviews

A recurring theme in our collaborative process was the vital importance of becoming relational with First Nations Peoples, Places, and knowledge. Since we authors are non-Indigenous people, we have drawn heavily on First Nations' scholarship to guide our thinking on this theme. Being relational asks us to engage wholeheartedly with First Nations' ways of knowing, being, and doing. We identified the importance of slowing down and listening deeply, Dadirri, which is the act of "being present, being still, connecting with yourself and the environment in such a profound way that it creates space for deep relationships" (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022, p. 96), while showing respect for the knowledge systems that have always existed since First Nations People first walked the earth.

As part of this process, we consider who we are in relation to *where* we are as being central to what we can know (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). By trying to consider who we are through the lens of First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing, we had to locate ourselves firstly as a group of people with a variety of heritages who are on First Nations Countries. With this comes a responsibility to continually practice and nurture relational accountability (Walter & Baltra-Ulloa, 2021). Being critically reflexive and agile is essential in building, maintaining, and strengthening relationships. Emily shared how she had to rethink her practice from a relational viewpoint: "On the agenda of I'm here to help ... I need to refocus on, I'm here to connect, I'm here to learn, I'm here to yarn and, in this sense, I'm here to walk with".

Likewise, Sophie stressed the importance of simply *connecting* as a social work practice that prioritises relationality:

I need to remember that the most important thing I can do is to take the time to be very present in the moment, to establish trust ... looking for small ways in which I can demonstrate that I am not here to impose, or judge, assess, or take. Rather, just to be really here as a person, in a real relationship with integrity.

Mel expressed that her social work education had not prepared her fully to work with First Nations Peoples:

The language, way of interacting, stories ... all so different from my city education. Does my practice wisdom make any sense up here in the Top End? I struggle with basic greetings.

Feeling like a bumbling toddler speaking gobbledegook... names are difficult to learn and family genograms extend in every direction, forever. Clinical settings and case notes no longer seem as meaningful. I want to meet on the beach. Listen to stories drawn from the landscape around me. On Country.

In this sense, building genuine connections with First Nations Peoples and seeking to learn is the main work of our practice. We propose that this joy and practice of learning and becoming relational with Peoples and Countries requires ongoing attention through critical reflection and reflexivity (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). Mel shared this sentiment regarding community engagement.

There are moments when I become the other and the student. Where I find myself being patiently taught by an Elder how to collect pandanus leaves and strip them ready for weaving, or tasting juicy steaming fresh mud mussels for the first time around a fire. In this role, I feel that I am contributing to something much more important, furthering understanding, and creating important relationships. I find myself sitting back and engaging in deep listening—Dadirri. I wonder if this is good social work practice in the NT... being with, deeply listening, and learning?

First Nations scholars helped us to move further into this relational space. To decolonise our practice through centring practice around First Nations ways of knowing, being, and doing. By doing so, we are held accountable in our practice by the integrity of our relationships and our capacity to engage in Dadirri. Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. (2022), explained that Dadirri means healing practice and is “a deep contemplative process of ‘listening to another’ in reciprocal relationships” (p. 94). Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020) outlined four steps: respect, connect, reflect, and direct, where “Direct is about acting on that shared knowledge in ways that are negotiated by all. If you follow those four steps, always ensuring you do the first two at the start, then you will begin to work in a relationally responsive way” (pp. 11–12).

Discussion

Working through the co-operative inquiry process was a participatory endeavour, prioritising the group over the individual. Co-operative inquiry is not an Indigenist research methodology, although we note points of compatibility. We recognise that co-operative inquiry is a qualitative method and relational in nature; hence, it is not objective or unbiased (Ungunmerr-Baumann et al., 2022, p. 95). As a group, we have inquired, slowed down, contemplated, deepened our awareness, and grown. We shared stories, experiences, and our critical reflections; we collaborated in a cyclic and iterative process, identifying themes and developing clarity (Hewlett et al., 2023). The co-operative inquiry methodology also mirrors our experience in working alongside many First Nations Peoples.

We are the researchers and authors of this work. We aim to add to the conversation as non-Indigenous people working in the unique context of the Northern Territory, Australia. As non-Indigenous people, we have consciously orientated this article towards what we are continually learning about ourselves and practising through being with First Nations Peoples on Country. Our inquiry has been informed deeply by First Nations scholars. As Bennett (2022) argued, this is critical for culturally responsive social work practice.

With this in mind, our co-operative inquiry addressed the research question “What have we learnt about practising social work in the NT, Australia?” Our inquiry adds to the limited scholarship on remote social work practice and critically reflects on and shares our experiences. In our inquiry, we have been reminded of the uniqueness of the NT, critical reflection and reflexivity, decolonising practice, and relational ways of being. We have discussed the benefits of questioning and being vulnerable, which then means we are able to question our worldviews, unlearn and relearn, and consciously engage with First Nations Peoples’ worldviews while recognising this is an ongoing interactive and iterative process. As King (2011) described, “The differences between these two worldviews can be understood by examining the place people occupy in relation to all other living things and all inanimate entities in the universe” (p. 66).

In theme 1, we recognised the importance of grounding our practice to Place. In order to be culturally responsive and practise reflexively, we have to first understand the impacts of colonisation on People and Place, and the connection between history and the current circumstances of the Peoples we work alongside (Hewlett et al., 2023). In taking this step, we needed to recognise and remember that First Nations Peoples have withstood “attempts to exterminate, enslave and deculture them” (Green & Baldry, 2008, p. 398). Consequently, central to living and working in the NT is resisting colonialist assumptions, structures, and systems. Further, our work consciously is couched in the tenets of social justice (AASW, 2020) and subverting colonising constructs and practices. This stance is achieved by listening to First Nations Peoples and reseeing (King, 2011), restorying, and reframing experiences (Rowe et al., 2015) that promulgate deficit narratives about People and Country (Hewlett et al., 2023).

This conscious decision helped our journey. As mentioned in theme 1, we moved away from theories and practices that label First Nations Peoples and Country as other. Instead, as mentioned in themes 2 and 3, we explored our vulnerability and actively sought out First Nations scholarship as our primary knowledge source. We took this action to help us articulate, shape, and understand our experiences, practice, and observations. This drew our attention to the discourse which labels the communities we walk alongside as remote. By listening to and learning from People and Country, we have engaged with an alternative concept of remoteness and, instead, now consider the many urban centres as remote from where we are in the NT. Critically engaging with our assumptions (such as the concept of remoteness) and vulnerabilities assisted us in naming our unconscious biases and challenging widely held understandings and societal structures that perpetuate colonisation (Green & Bennett, 2018, p. 262). We are slowly unlearning the legacies of colonisation (Hewlett et al., 2023).

Embracing vulnerability is consistent with Green and Bennett’s (2018) scholarship, which invites us as individuals “and in turn the profession to undergo a journey of self-discovery and a personal process of decolonising selves” (p. 263). For this collective journey, we identified common experiential themes that honoured our self-doubt as social workers, while aiming for cultural responsiveness, social justice, and ethical practice (AASW, 2020). By listening to the people we work alongside, we are learning ways of working based on First Nations Peoples’ wisdom and worldviews. As theme 3 highlights, for us, being immersed in First Nations scholarship and worldviews, engaging with the joy of being on Country, listening to and learning from Elders, and being relational means that though we are professionally isolated, we are not alone as we practise.

Our journey is ongoing as we endeavour to develop our understanding and our practice knowledge further. We continue to engage in critical reflection on previously unexamined aspects of practice and self. Our experience of practice in the NT is a call for reflective action to our colleagues in other locations; a call to reconsider the ways in which teaching, learning, and practice can be shaped and deepened by what we have learnt about the need for social work to be relational, vulnerable, and situated in every way together with People on Country.

Limitations

We recognise that we have presented our own practice wisdom and experiential knowledge and that our observations may differ from others' views. We are conscious that a First Nations perspective was not obtained regarding the recommendations. Further, we acknowledge our positionality as non-Indigenous social workers and recognise this study would have been different if First Nations social workers had participated in our inquiry. Another limitation is that we have not explicitly identified the specific legislation and policies implemented in the NT since colonisation that have disregarded, oppressed, disadvantaged, discriminated against, and displaced First Nations Peoples. Further, from a place of deep respect for the First Nations Peoples we have worked alongside, we have not identified or elaborated on our practice roles or contexts on Country. Despite the limitations, our inquiry has utility due to its descriptive and reflective qualities and the possibility of this informing other people's everyday social work practice in the Northern Territory, Australia.

Recommendations for Social Work Education and Practice

We recommend, first, that social work schools continue their important work of Indigenising education, decolonising ideology to promote culturally responsive practice. Second, we suggest that non-Indigenous social workers practising in the NT engage with First Nations scholarship, Elders', and Peoples' worldviews and wisdom as primary sources of knowledge. Third, social workers continue to critically reflect, challenge, and actively resist colonising policies and approaches impacting social work practice, education, and organisational policies and procedures. Fourth, that social workers recognise that English is often the third or fourth language spoken by First Nations Peoples in the NT, and that research is needed about what are the implications of this for social work. Fifth, we recommend more social workers in Australia form writing collaborations and publicly share unique practice experiences.

Conclusion

In this inquiry, we acknowledge the isolation that many Australian social workers in the Northern Territory experience. Social workers in the NT have the fortune of working on unique Country and connecting with First Nations Peoples and worldviews in ways not experienced elsewhere in Australia. This engagement with Country, First Nations Peoples, and their scholarship helped us address our research question "What have we learnt about practising social work in the Northern Territory, Australia?" The themes

identified through this inquiry grew out of our experiences. Our themes reflect our striving to be as culturally humble and responsive as possible. This striving is important because our work involves partnering with First Nations Peoples, many of whom have already experienced extensive trauma.

We contend there is a need to be critically aware and recognise that many First Nations Peoples distrust the systems and mandated requirements informing social work practice. This is in addition to the oppression that many First Nations Peoples we work with have faced and continue to face when engaging with services. However, we can reject, resist, or problematise colonising practices. We can choose, without appropriating, to position Country and First Nations Peoples' worldviews as primary and essential sources of knowledge for social work practice. We recognise that critical reflexivity and the principles of Dadirri help us continually grow our social work practice. We hope that by sharing our joys, challenges, practice wisdom, reflections, and learnings, this article will extend existing conversations and inspire others to begin to share their wisdom about practising in the NT and other places across this land now called Australia.

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