Towards an interactional approach to reflective practice in social work

Author details

Steve Kirkwood (corresponding author)
Social Work
School of Social and Political Science
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
 The University of Edinburgh
+44 (0)131 650 6646
s.kirkwood@ed.ac.uk

Beth Jennings
Social Work
School of Social and Political Science
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
The University of Edinburgh
+44 (0) 7443 568 358
B.A.M.Jennings@sms.ed.ac.uk

Eric Laurier
Geography
School of GeoSciences
Geography Building
Drummond Street
Edinburgh EH8 9XP
The University of Edinburgh
+44 (0) 131 651 4303
Eric.Laurier@ed.ac.uk

Viviene E. Cree
Social Work
School of Social and Political Science
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
 The University of Edinburgh
+44 (0)131 650 3927
Viv.Cree@ed.ac.uk

Bill Whyte
Social Work
School of Social and Political Science
Chrystal Macmillan Building
15a George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
 The University of Edinburgh

+44 (0)131 651 1462
B.Whyte@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

Reflective practice is a key aspiration within social work; being a reflective practitioner is considered to be a foundational attribute of the social work professional. However, achieving reflective practice is not straightforward. Reflection is inevitably subject to issues of memory and recall, so that the recollection of a case is likely to differ in important ways from the original instance. Moreover, giving an account of an event to one's peers or supervisors involves aspects of justification and self-presentation that may emphasise selectively and ignore key details of the original event, whether through a process of conscious omission or subconscious forgetting. This article reports on a knowledge exchange project that sought to enhance criminal justice social workers' reflective practice through the use of Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM), an approach that is methodologically and theoretically grounded in the study of talk-in-interaction, drawing on video re-enactments of real encounters between practitioners and service users. We argue that by engaging collaboratively in this way, the practitioners and researchers learned a great deal about how practice in criminal justice social work is 'done' (that is, reflection) and also about the wider context within which criminal justice social work is practised (that is, critical reflection).

Key words: social work, reflective practice, talk-in-interaction, knowledge exchange, CARM, conversation analysis

Introduction

This article brings together two bodies of knowledge that are core to social work: reflective practice and interaction. In doing so, it makes four central assumptions. Firstly, it assumes that encouraging social workers to reflect on their practice is a good thing, because by being critically reflective, social workers will be better at what they do, hence improving the experiences of those who use social services (The College of Social Work, 2012). Secondly, it assumes that social work is an interactive activity; interaction between social workers, service users, family members, professionals and a range of other individuals is a core element of social work practice (Ruch, 2009). Analysing such interaction thus provides an important opportunity to look at social work practice from the 'inside'. Thirdly, it assumes that learning is a relational activity; that we learn best alongside others (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Because of this, it is imperative that open, supportive spaces are identified where reflection (and hence self-learning) can take place. Finally, it assumes that knowledge exchange activities (KE), where academics come together with practitioners to share their different knowledges and perspectives, offer significant avenues for joint learning, and increase the likelihood that learning will 'stick'; hence it is more likely to be subsequently used in practice (Wilkinson et al, 2012).

The article reports on a KE event that used Stokoe's (2014) interactional research method known as Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM) to interrogate practice within a criminal justice social work setting in Scotland. This context is of particular interest, because it was here that 'evidence-based' practice discourses became operationalised in social work in Scotland during the 1990s, demonstrating the rise of New Labour's 'what works' agenda in UK social policy and promoting a pragmatic, instrumental view of knowledge and its applications (Nutley et al, 2007). This approach has been roundly criticised in recent years, as the complex nature of practice is acknowledged, as well as the importance of an analysis that

takes account of political, social and relational aspects of practice (McNeill and Whyte, 2007).

Reflective practice

Reflective practice examines professional practice with the intention of exposing gaps, problems and contradictions, for the purpose of improving practice (Askeland and Fook, 2009). Critical reflection is an extension of this process, which aims for a deeper level of questioning of practitioners' assumptions. Fook and Gardner (2007) suggest that critical reflection shares with postmodern theory the idea there are different and, at times, competing knowledges in any given situation; more than this, critical reflection challenges the notion that there is a single 'truth' that can be uncovered if only one digs deeply enough. Drawing on critical social theory, critical reflection also encourages an analysis of power relations and issues related to ideology.

Reflective practice is a key aspect of much social work education; as argued by Dominelli (2009), it is particularly important for anti-oppressive practice, as it involves practitioners considering power relations with a view to correcting power imbalances and encouraging power sharing. However, as highlighted by Wilson (2013), there is wide variation in how this is practised and its benefits to social work students. He also highlighted that, in agencies with a strong emphasis on procedures, reflective practice could become 'routinised', turning them into a 'tick box' exercise that held little value for the students. In social work education, Dempsey, Halton and Murphy (2001) outlined how reflective practice in social work education can assist students to become comfortable with self-reflection, using role-play to explore communication skills, effective practice and the embodiment of values.

However, Brookfield (2009) has argued that 'critical reflection' involves more than discussing aspects of effective practice, and demands an interrogation of the role of ideology in practice. Ruch (2009) describes a relationship-based model of reflective practice, which involves a practitioner describing a practice situation to a small group of peers, allowing them to explore it in a tentative and 'curious' (rather than interrogative) manner, before the practitioner returns to the conversation to comment on the discussion. She suggests that the creation of a space for discussion allows the questioning of assumptions that would create 'critical reflection' and how practitioners actually present their case becomes part of the material for discussion. What if the tentative and the curious is taken still further through reflecting on recordings that need not be presented as a case but can instead be examined as if they are contingent events where what also has to be reflected upon is that what happened next is not known by the students nor the service users? Research on interaction provides ways of answering this question.

Research on interaction

Discourse analysis (DA) and conversation analysis (CA) are forms of analysis that are used to explore the relationships between multiple actors' actions by drawing upon audio and video recordings and transcriptions of events (Wooffitt, 2005). In common with a number of other approaches in the social sciences, discourse analysis and conversation analysis treat language as actively constructing reality, rather than reflecting a pre-existing reality. By treating language as social action, DA & CA attend to the way that people 'do' things with words, including blaming, justifying and criticising (M. Lynch 1993; McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). CA attempts to recover participants' orientations by focusing on

the organisation of action and analysis done by the participants in the original event rather than importing forms of analysis produced in the social sciences. Thus, it has examined the relationship between pairs of actions such as offering advice and responding to that advice, complimenting and responding to compliments, questions and answers and so on (Liddicoat, 2011; ten Have, 2007).

DA and CA have been applied to a range of institutional contexts, including: doctor-patient interactions (Heritage & Maynard, 2005); child protection help-lines (Butler, Potter, Danby, Emmison & Hepburn, 2010); police suspect interrogations (Stokoe & Edwards, 2008); neighbour mediation services (Stokoe, 2013a); and psychotherapy (Fitzgerald, 2013). There is a growing body of research that involves the analysis of interactions within social work services (e.g., Caswell, Eskelinen & Olesen, 2013; Hall, Juhila, Matarese & van Nijnatten, 2014; Juhila & Pösö, 1999a, 1999b; Nijnatten, 2013; Räsänen, 2014). By analysing video or audio recordings of events as they happen this research has provided insights into the practices that constitute institutions, and how certain institutional practices work (and don't work).

The analysis of actual instances of practice requires changes in how 'reflective practice' and 'critical reflection' are pursued. It requires the careful analysis of sequences of actions that will then show what happens when emancipatory policies meet local interactional requirements and both how institutional authority is exercised and responded to. For example, Robinson and Heritage (2014) illustrated how, in medical settings, paediatricians could use certain interactional styles that would increase parents' acceptance of vaccines yet result in lower levels of satisfaction. Their study underlined that the pursuit of practitioner goals inadvertently limited service user autonomy and choice. Similarly, where social work practices are intended to increase service users' participation in decision-making, they may actually circumscribe such participation through how participation is produced in talk (e.g., Hall & Morriss, 2014). What conversation analysis provides is access to the local instantiation of institutional practices through actual episodes of their occurrence, which allows researchers and practitioners to move beyond abstract discussions of institutional principles while also providing an empirical grounding for critical social theorising. The use of audio or video recordings provides an alternative access to the original events in social work cases than the 'accounts of accounts', which are inherent in interview-based research and some forms of reflective practice (see Hackett & Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, reflective practices based on accounts of earlier events, rather than recordings, lose the logic of the unfolding actions as they are produced on a moment-by-moment basis by the parties involved. A reflective practice that draws upon CA and DA is one that holds off on reflection a little longer in a desire to first more closely describe the events which may then radically alter what it is that is being reflected upon.

Interactional research and knowledge exchange

Bringing CA into knowledge exchange activities has great potential, because it allows researchers and practitioners to explore practice collaboratively, building findings and recommendations from data and analysis that places them back into the contingency of the original events, rather than working from a post hoc position where the consequences of particular actions are known in advance. This creates an exchange of knowledge between conversation analysts learning from the practitioners' understanding of the original events as well as insights from conversation analysis informing service provision. This is in-line with the growing recognition that knowledge exchange requires direct engagement and dialogue,

rather than, for instance, merely providing research findings to potential knowledge users (Meagher, Lyall & Nutley, 2008). Conversation analysis has recently developed a unique format for this dialogue - the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM; Stokoe, 2014). It involves introducing practitioners to the basic approach of conversation analysis, and playing extracts of recordings of real practitioner work. To recapture the sense of contingency in the original event, where what happens next is unknown, the recording is paused at key points and practitioners are invited to guess what happens next and explore on that basis their expectations and reflect on aspects of the interaction.

CARM has been applied to police interviews and community mediation, leading to a better understanding of how to produce questions, avoid problematic responses, maintain neutrality and so on, which has then been used to train police officers and community mediators (Stokoe, 2013a, 2013b). In addition to its potential to improve understandings of practice among practitioners, knowledge exchange using CARM allows researchers an opportunity to reflect on their own analytic methods and check the validity of their findings (e.g., Juhila & Pösö, 1999a). The remainder of the article focuses on presenting a case study of a specific knowledge exchange event drawing on this approach.

Applying CARM to Social Work

The knowledge exchange activities were based on the first author's research, involved the transcription and analysis of video recordings of five routine sessions from two cognitive-behavioural groupwork programmes run by local authority criminal justice social work services in Scotland, addressing domestic abuse and sexual offending respectively. The research was approved by the university's relevant ethics committee and by the ethical approval process within the local authorities. The service users and practitioners in the video recordings gave written consent to participate in the research. The project's aim was to explore the potential for applying an interactional approach to the study of criminal justice social work practice, connecting this to theory and research on effective practice and desistance from offending. The knowledge exchange event provided a forum to test this approach to establish its value for reflective practice and practice improvement, as well as validate the study findings.

Structure of the knowledge exchange event

Drawing on the principles of CARM (Stokoe, 2014), the authors arranged a knowledge exchange seminar, taking place in Spring 2014, where 34 stakeholders – mostly criminal justice social workers and service managers – came together to discuss the methods and preliminary findings from the research. The event was structured into three sections: 1) an introduction to conversation analysis and discourse analysis, with the presentation of some preliminary findings; 2) breakout sessions where small groups explored specific extracts from the data in detail, encouraged by a facilitator; and 3) a plenary session at the end with the whole group for feeding back from the groups and wider discussion. The event then was not straightforwardly a demonstration of CARM in action, lying somewhere between the primary research to form the basis of later CARM work, an evaluation of CARM in a social work context (where it has not yet been tried) and demonstrating CARM.

Due to the sensitive nature of the data, the original video material could not be shown at the event. In a novel solution to anonymisation problems, actors were employed to re-enact

extracts from the original recordings, using the detailed transcripts, which were video recorded in advance of the knowledge exchange event.

Following the CARM process (Stokoe, 2014), the video clips were played with the transcript appearing at the appropriate times on the screen, and paused at points where actions were potentially completed. At these junctures, the event participants were left with the intrigue of now knowing what happened next, though they knew that this would later be revealed and then the facilitator shaped the discussion around: 'What is going on here?', 'What might happen next?' and 'As a practitioner, what would you do next?' While the facilitator could initiate the discussions, practitioners frequently provided immediate assessments of the other practitioners or formulations of the problem being posed by the service user. However the questions were deliberately posed to shift the practitioners and researchers away from immediate assessment of practitioners' actions and toward a detailed description of what had just happened in the recording and to then reflect on their expectations of what certain actions by either the service user or social worker would generate as likely next actions. The practitioners were also encouraged by the researchers to compare what and how the social workers were responding to their own skilled ways of responding to service users.

Describing, anticipating and reflecting upon the complexity of a groupwork session helped to make explicit for the researchers the key aspects of effective practice and encouraged reflection on the relationship between ideal practices and what is possible as events unfold. It was a discussion that was profoundly shaped by the practitioners not knowing what happened next and desiring to find out whether their informed guesses turned out to be the case. It becomes then a way of re-establishing the contingencies that practitioners face in the moment when they are practicing rather than reflecting on an event where the consequences are known in advance. For the CA researcher the orientation to the contingency of those events for practitioners is where the analysis begins though equally for them also the pause and re-start becomes a useful device to help consider the alternative courses of action that are conditionally relevant at any point in the sequential organisation of action.

Example analysis of social work practice

The following example draws on a video recording of the re-enactment of a groupwork programme for addressing domestic abuse which was used in one of the breakout sessions at the event. Central to the CARM approach, the longer courses of events were broken into four smaller conversational actions, as presented below. There were then descriptions of what had happened and discussions among the KE participants after each extract.

Pseudonyms have been used to maintain anonymity. SW is the (female) social worker and Colin (C) is the (male) service user. Everyone but SW and C had left the room for a break, most of them smoking outside. Earlier in the session, C had disclosed being physically abused by his father when he was younger. SW is sitting with legs crossed, left arm on armrest, right elbow at knee, hand at mouth, looking at C. C is sitting with right leg on knee, arms crossed, looking off to right. SW now attends to that earlier disclosure by C. The transcription symbols are explained in the appendix.

Extract 1
1   SW   ((shake of head, to C)) thanks for that, I didn't expect you to share anything
2   ((smiling)) (2.5) Colin
3   C   ((looks at SW)) (really?)

4	SW	I didn't expect you to share anything, it was really brave
5		(2.0)
6	C	I was only speaking the truth eh
7	SW	yeah

In the opening of this extract, we see that the social worker thanks the service user, compliments him and thereby reinforces his contributions of the group. In particular, the social worker constructs his contributions as positive through referencing her own expectations and suggesting that he surpassed these. The service user's response could be seen as 'resisting' this evaluation (Juhila, Caswell & Raitakari, 2014), however from drawing on CA research on the giving and receiving of compliments (Pomerantz, 1978) we can understand that C's downplaying of his actions is a conventional way of receiving praise that works toward portraying the speaker as modest. Moreover, stating 'I was only speaking the truth' presents his disclosure as factual rather than, say, being spoken in order to gain sympathy or in order to be seen as 'brave' in the way suggested by the social worker.

This fragment was stopped in the KE session at to carefully consider whether the social worker's actions were encouragement and positive reinforcement, which might then encourage the service user to contribute to the group in future. From their experience they raised the difficulties of responding to a disclosure in its own terms or as instead a gambit of compliance in order to complete and be released from the groupwork. Very quickly then they began to supplement the interactional approach with their insider's knowledge of the institutional tactics that might then be in play. They also recognised that the conversation was a sensitive one, and the worker may wish to move closer to the service user as a way of acknowledging and dealing with the personal nature of the conversation. To help hold the practitioners to the recording of the event, the facilitator then offered the opportunity to see what did happen next to see whether it might confirm or discount early conjectures about what the practitioner and/or service user were doing.

Extract 2

8		(2.0)
9	SW	((big intake of breath, leans towards C, still seated on other side of room))
10		do you know what, see as a child ya cannae (.) do anything but see now (2.5)
11		no one can do that to you now (.) and this is [about
12	C	[I already know that but I think it's
13		up to (.) the person who you're close to and that
14	SW	but you can change and that's why you're here
15	C	I've already changed but that's not the point (.) because the damage has still
16		been done (3.5) so I'm a write-off forever (.) it's already (happened and it
17		shouldn't've)

Backing up one of conjectures of the KE event participants, the social worker continued to show warmth and understanding through leaning further forward, showing an orientation toward their conversation becoming more intimate. She then talks in a general way about 'as a child ya cannae (.) do anything', which portrays the service user as not being responsible for what happened in his past, going on to suggest that people cannot affect him in this way any longer. The service user interrupts the social worker, and stating 'I already know that' works to stop the social worker's account, by suggesting her informing is redundant. The social worker however does not give up and changes tack slightly saying, 'but you can change and that's why you're here', which does not deny the importance of the service user's childhood

experiences nor his knowledge. In fact not only does the social worker emphasise the potential for positive change but uses a common technique of providing evidence of his desire for change by referencing his presence in the groupwork programme. Once again, the local events are not so simple: by saying 'I've already changed', the service user is able to reject the social worker's positive point about his potential to change. Moreover, by emphasising the 'damage' that has been done (presumably from his offending behaviour), and using the phrase 'so I'm a write-off forever', the service user connects his offending behaviour with a permanent negative state. However, it is worth noting that both SW & C use the conjunction 'but' several times (lines 10, 12, 14, 15), which signals contrasting viewpoints without creating absolute disagreement, and in this sense perhaps suggests that rapport is being maintained even though they are putting forward slightly different arguments.

Having halted the action earlier at a point where a number of possibilities lay ahead for the social worker, the KE event participants were now presented with a situation that had become more complicated as the social worker tried to build further on the earlier disclosure and the compliment just offered. Moving to the next part of the episode allowed the practitioners to then reject one of the initial conjectures: that C was complying through his disclosure. In other words, how the disclosure was to be understood was being clarified for the practitioners by the ongoing interpretation of the disclosure being supplied by the service user. At the same time the material was rich for further consideration of what each practitioner might themselves have tried to do in the next stage. For example, practitioners with experience in groupwork speculated on whether time might be an issue, because the other service users could return shortly from their break, so the social worker may wish to highlight the lack of time and find ways to contain the discussion or suggest it could continue at a time after the session.

In the suspension of the action at line 17 the practitioners are then themselves presented by what now seems to be a routine and recognisable problem, along with a more or less familiar path as to how they arrived there. The service user is on a downward spiral expressed in their extreme case self-formulation: 'I'm a write off forever'. The live question for them in the KE event and for the social worker in the group session is how to recuperate or in some way do the work of helping a service user whose trajectory is at odds with groupwork. Though, of course, the disclosure remains a hopeful sign of engagement with the group.

Extract 3
18	SW	but that's not who you are, that's just something you've done (.) it's not who
19		you are (.) it's a behaviour (.) it's not you
20	C	try telling the polis[1] that (.) every time they turn up at the house [(unclear)
21	SW	[they're still
22		turning up all the time?
23	C	aye (3.0) I'm sick of it

The social worker provides a direct negation of the self-formulation just provided by the service user, a move which might seem to be the basis for disagreement except that it is embedded in a context where to agree would be to seek to demean or humiliate the service user. The factuality of the service user's past actions that lead to them being here still has to

---

[1] Polis is local dialect for police.

be dealt with given it was raised as undeniable earlier and this is skilfully accomplished by SW separating actions from character and in time ('done' compared to 'are').

The social worker's ongoing attempt to reassure the service user is disagreed with this time by turning to a different institutional agent– 'try telling the polis that'. In other words, while C does not directly contradict SW's construction of him as someone who can change and whose character-defining actions were in the past, he brings in an institutional agent that does have that view of his character as forever marked by his actions. Referencing this external source, and particularly one of authority, functions to support the factuality of his troubles (Potter, 1996), while also complicating the social worker's affiliation (given they can be categorised as part of a larger aligned institution of state monitoring and regulation). At this point the social worker shows a further degree of intimacy through her recall of C's previous reported troubles with the police.

 The KE participants recognised the extent to which the social worker's comments distinguished between the service user's nature and his behaviour, as a way of supporting the potential for change and SW's skill in linking this into the groupwork. They could also see the change in courses of action at lines 21 and 22 as the social worker shifted from motivational work to a response that might have been sympathy or might just be marking the police still visiting as 'news'. From their experience of similar situations, they again noted that this interaction was subject to time pressure, so the social worker may choose to offer options at this stage in terms of asking what the service user wanted to do, including taking some time out from the group.

Extract 4

24		(2.0)
25	SW	((looks down)) have you got fags, do you smoke?
26	C	(.) ((nods))
27	SW	do you want a fag?
28	C	to be honest money's that tight I've not got (fuck all ya know)
29	SW	do you want one of these? ((picks up cigarettes and goes over to C))
30	C	if ya dunnae mind, thanks
31	SW	and there's one for later as well (.) there (.) for the next break
32		((gives two cigarettes to C))
33	C	thanks
34	SW	you're welcome (.) come on out, have time to get a fag ((both start walking
35		outside, right of camera)) (.) well done for sharing that
36		(2.0)
37	C	like I said (.) it's the truth eh
38		((they both leave the room))

After the brief silence, the social worker first asks 'have you got fags' and then repairs this to 'do you smoke?' While this orients to the fact that the other service users are currently outside smoking, it also solidifies the departure from the formal groupwork in the previous parts of this episode, to an offer of immediate and material consolation. 'Do you want a fag?' can be recognised as an offer here not of the 'service' but sitting in contrast with that work identity. The service user responds with a generalised comment about his financial situation, which continues the factual nature of his current suffering though now with a more accepting stance. Showing recognition of his plight, SW adds a further cigarette to her offer (line 31)

and in doing so orients to cigarettes being related to participating in the cigarette breaks outside of the room.

Having got a 'thanks' out of the service user at line 33 which recognises and accepts her offer, she moves toward a 'happier' ending for their brief discussion where he will still enjoy the breaktime and in closing she re-does her praise for his disclosure during the session. While her compliment can be understood as her doing the social worker's work of 'positive reinforcement' (Trotter, 2009), what it also does is revisit her earlier compliment thereby also returning them to their institutional identities. The service user then also seeks to avoid his disclosure being seen as mere compliance to the programme, reiterating his claim to its factuality (Edwards, 2007). The repetition here continues to mark that he was not up to something by his disclosure. Through SW physically handing the cigarettes to C, she has greatly reduced the physical distance between them at the start of the extract, and they then exit the room together. These actions can be understood as addressing power imbalances through emphasising commonality (Charnley, Roddam & Wistow, 2009).

The practitioners were able to recognise how the social worker's response functioned in the context of this interaction, in terms of how it created a sense of togetherness or companionship for the social worker to share her personal supply of cigarettes with the service user. Drawing once again on their knowledge as social workers they also noted that this response served to shift the focus away from the substantive issue, about the service user's disclosure of experiencing abuse, although it may have provided some 'relief' for the social worker and also dealt with the issue of time pressure. This was one of the parts where CARM came into its own because at this point the participants did not anticipate this response on the part of the social worker however they were able to reflect on this particular response in the light of more likely institutional alternatives, while enjoying the initial element of surprise.

Discussion

Focusing on this series of extracts from a larger episode of groupwork allowed a closer examination of actual practice than would be possible without the recordings. Conversation analysis provided a shift of focus to the sequences of action as produced by both service user and social worker in ways that de-centre the social worker, if then to re-centre them with their work constituted in dialogue with service users whose needs and problems only emerge as part of that dialogue. Post hoc reports tend toward both summarisation and evaluation, whereas conversation analysis pushes toward careful description of the events and tries to set aside initial evaluations through the step-by-step analysis of each party's actions in response to the other's actions. It examines how events are locally accomplished by the members of those situations, as well as demonstrating that the actual practices that accomplished the routine institutional tasks are skilful and complex. Importantly, the focus is then not on judging the social worker's initiatives and responses as good or bad, but rather on noticing troubles tracking back and forth through courses of action-in-interaction-in-institutions to understand the difficulties and subtleties of doing social work in the face of real (rather than role-playing) service users. It also provided an opportunity to open up the possible meanings and interpretations that could be attached in aspects of the interaction, considering it from the perspective of different people involved in the interaction.

Although we are only touching on the complexities of groupwork within one short event at the end of a longer period of groupwork, which was 1:1 rather than in the group, we have

begun to show how the analysis of recordings of real time and real world, rather than role-played, social work can help in understanding this distinctive form of work accomplished through talk. The analysis and discussion highlight a number of issues, including: how social workers make connections with service users through expressing warmth, understanding, positive reinforcement and sharing; separating out the person from the behaviour in order to encourage positive change; how 'resistance' can be understood in the context of interactions; the use of praise and how this may be received; and the role of physical space. Many other issues could also be explored. For instance, in terms of Brookfield's (2009) comments about critical reflection, the references to finances here, and in other materials, could provide a resource for interrogating the role of financial precarity in relation to offending, desistance, and the social work role. The analysis can help to re-specify ideology in the light of the methodic ways that social workers maintain, challenge, transform and ironise ideological assumptions about offenders, domestic abuse and gender on the ground. In the case of criminal justice social work, considering how identities emerge in and through talk can help practitioners to develop ethical and critical practices that avoid simply reifying the identity categories and notions of criminality that are imposed by the criminal justice system, and locate their work in the appropriate structural contexts (see H. Lynch, 2014).

Conclusion: On needing to know what happened next.

Engaging Conversation Analytic Role-play Method to the long established tradition of reflective practice in social work, provides new understanding of social work practice as it is accomplished through talk. In terms of practice, it provides a grounding in 'real' instances of action-in-interaction that can facilitate both 'reflective practice', in the sense of considering ways of engaging with service users, and 'critical reflection' (Brookfield, 2009; Ruch, 2009). Theoretically, it facilitates an understanding of social work that is grounded in instances of talk-in-interaction that return the practitioners to a participant's perspective where what happens next is a live issue, meaning that it is one step less removed than understandings based on post-hoc interviews with practitioners.

In relation to social work research, exploring practice through CARM provides clear frameworks for analysing data, and the engagement with practitioners allows observations and conclusions from both researchers and practitioners to be discussed, and validated and invalidated in equal measure. CARM can offer opportunities for practitioners to bring their expert knowledge on the institution to bear on the analyses to deepen understanding (Juhila & Pösö, 1999a) and open up discussions regarding the generation of meaning, including consideration of the interpretations available to the original participants in the interaction and those involved in the subsequent analysis. Drew, Toerien, Irvine and Sainsbury (2014, p. 315) have highlighted some of the key advantages of conversation analysis (CA):

> CA does not rely on "mediated" versions of what happened or on accounts that are shaped by participants' memories or their normative expectations. CA is a form of natural history of social interaction, documenting what happens, and uncovering the practices that underlie what happens. It may turn out that just that—the documentation of practice—can be uncomfortable or even controversial for certain organizations.

As they suggest, it has a number of advantages over approaches to practice and research that rely on post-hoc accounts of events, including reflective practices that involve practitioners giving accounts of particular cases and discussing them with peers (e.g., Ruch, 2009).

Moreover, Stokoe (2013b, 2014) has illustrated and argued that CARM has advantages over traditional uses of role-plays in training contexts, such as that used in social work education (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2001). However, there are sensitivities around using CARM where practitioners from the organisation under scrutiny, or indeed the specific practitioners themselves, are present – particularly as the brief instances of interaction that are analysed may be taken out of context or be unrepresentative of wider practices. In these cases in particular, further work may need to be done in order to create the 'safe space' (Ruch, 2009) for using CARM in social work training and research. Using actors was one solution to this problem though a stronger one is in using data which is older and thus seen as less accountable to an individual's contemporary practices.

Overall, this approach offers one way of bringing together social work practice and research in a way that is mutually beneficial and grounded both in actual practice and established methodological and analytical traditions. CARM can be used at different levels, including in terms of general social work education, individuals reflecting on their own practice, and teams / organisations that wish to identify opportunities for change. In terms of social work education, systematic studies of social work interaction (e.g., Hall et al., 2014) can help inform skills training and understandings of effective practice. As we have argued, while it can also help to build upon reflective practices as they currently exist within social work services, it is also requires change in those reflective practices which suspend the reflective moment for longer in favour of describing and further understanding of the original events. In relation to teams and organisations, CARM can help to gain a critical perspective on existing practices, and identify opportunities for change. The approach also has potential for enhancing action research and evaluation projects, as a way of exploring practice and facilitating practitioners to engage with their own practices and make the implicit explicit. All of these could assist with the development of effective tools for training and reflection within social work. Using a CARM approach to reflective practice, and a reflective approach to CARM, through knowledge exchange, has the potential to greatly enhance both activities. Further research could explore the opportunities and limitations of such an approach in relation to social work, particularly given the specific context of the profession's commitment to reflective practice, and what might be gained or lost through the application of these methods of analysing interaction.

References

Askeland, G. A. & Fook, J. (2009). Critical reflection in social work. *European Journal of Social Work, 12,* 287-292.

Beckett, D. & Hager, P. (2002). *Life, work and learning.* Routledge: London.

Brookfield, S. (2009). The concept of critical reflection: promises and contradictions. *European Journal of Social Work, 12,* 293-304.

Butler, C., Potter, J., Danby, S., Emmison, M. & Hepburn, A. (2010). Advice implicative interrogatives: Building 'client centred' support in a children's helpline. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 73,* 265-287.

Caswell, D., Eskelinen, L. & Olesen, S. P. (2013). Identity work and client resistance underneath the canopy of active employment policy. *Qualitative Social Work, 12,* 8-23.

Charnley, H., Roddam, G. & Wistow, J. (2009). Working with service users and carers. In L. Dominelli & M. Payne (Eds.). *Social work: Themes, issues and critical debates* (3rd ed.) (pp. 193-208). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

The College of Social Work (2012). *Developing your social work practice using the PCF: Integrated critical analysis and reflective practice* [online]. Available at: www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedfiles/TheCollege/Media_centre/PCF21IntegratedCriticalReflectivePractice(1).pdf

Dempsey, M., Halton, C. & Murphy, M. (2001). Reflective learning in social work education: Scaffolding the process. *Social Work Education: The International Journal, 20,* 631-641.

Dominelli, L. (2009). Anti-oppressive practice: The challenges of the twenty-first century. In L. Dominelli & M. Payne (Eds.). *Social work: Themes, issues and critical debates* (3rd ed.) (pp. 49-64). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Drew, P., Toerien, M., Irvine, A. & Sainsbury, R. (2014). Personal adviser interviews with benefits claimants in UK jobcentres. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 47,* 306-316.

Edwards, D. (2007). Managing subjectivity in talk. In A. Hepburn & S. Wiggins (Eds.), *Discursive research in practice: New approaches to psychology and interaction* (pp. 31-49). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fitzgerald, P. (2013). *Therapy talk: Conversation analysis in practice.* Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.

Fook, J. & Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising critical reflection: A resource handbook.* Open University Press: Maidenhead.

Hackett, S. & Taylor, A. (2013). Decision making in social work with children and families: The use of experiential and analytical cognitive processes. *British Journal of Social Work* [advanced access]. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct071

Hall, C., Juhila, K., Matarese, M. & van Nijnatten, C. (eds.). (2014). *Analysing social work communication: Discourse in practice.* Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Hall, C. & Morriss, L. (2014, August). *Progress, risk and choice in mental health review meetings.* Paper presented to the 11th annual meeting of the Discourse and Narrative Approaches to Social Work and Counselling Research Group, Durham, UK.

Heritage, J. & Maynard, D. W. (2005). *Communication in medical care: Interactions between primary care physicians and patients.* Cambridge: UK.

Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13-31). Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Juhila, K., Caswell, D. & Raitakari, S. (2014). Resistance. In C. Hall, K. Juhila, M. Matarese, & C. van Nijnatten (Eds.), *Analysing social work communication: Discourse in practice* (pp. 117-135). Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Juhila, K. & Pösö, T. (1999a). Local cultures in social work. Ethnographic understanding and discourse analysis in probation work. In S. Karvinen, T. Pösö & M. Satka (eds.), *Reconstructing social work research* (pp. 165-207). Jyväskylä: SoPhi and Sosiaalityön tutkimuksen seura.

Juhila, K. & Pösö, T. (1999b). Negotiating Constructions: Rebridging Social Work Research and Practice in the Context of Probation Work. In A. Jokinen, K. Juhila & T. Pösö (eds.), *Constructing social work practices* (pp. 274-303). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2011). *An introduction to conversation analysis.* London: Continuum.

Lynch, H. (2014). Seeking ethical symmetry: An analysis of criminal justice social work practice with a female 'offender'. *Ethics and Social Welfare, 8,* 408-416.

Lynch, M. (1993). *Scientific Practice and Ordinary Action.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McKinlay, A. & McVittie, C. (2008). *Social psychology & discourse.* Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

McNeill, F. & Whyte, B. (2007). *Reducing re-offending: Community justice and social work in Scotland.* Cullompton: Willan Press.

Meagher, L., Lyall, C. & Nutley, S. (2008). Flows of knowledge, expertise and influence: A method for assessing policy and practice impacts from social science research. *Research Evaluation, 17,* 163–173.

Nijnatten, C. van (2013). Downgrading as a counterstrategy: A case study in child welfare. *Child & Family Social Work, 18,* 139-148.

Nutley, S.M., Walter, I. & Davies, H.T.O. (2007). *Using evidence: How research can inform public services.* Bristol: The Policy Press.

Pomerantz, A. (1978) Compliment responses: Notes on the cooperation of multiple constraints. In Schenkein, J (ed.) *Studies in the Organisation of Conversational Interaction* (pp. 79-112). New York: Academic Press.

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction.* London: Sage.

Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour.* London: Sage.

Räsänen, J.-M. (2014). Emergency social workers navigating between computer and client. *British Journal of Social Work* [early view]. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bcu031

Robinson, J. D. & Heritage, J. (2014). Intervening with conversation analysis: The case of medicine. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 47,* 201-218,

Ruch, G. (2009). Identifying 'the critical' in a relationship-based model of reflection. *European Journal of Social Work, 12,* 349-362.

Silverman, D. (1998). *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Stokoe, E. (2013a). Overcoming barriers to mediation in intake calls to services: Research-based strategies for mediators. *Negotiation Journal, 29,* 289-314.

Stokoe, E. (2013b). The (in)authenticity of simulated talk: Comparing role-played and actual conversation and the implications for communication training. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 46,* 1-21.

Stokoe, E. (2014). The Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM): A method for training communication skills as an alternative to simulated role-play. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 47,* 255–265.

Stokoe, E., & Edwards, D. (2008). "Did you have permission to smash your neighbour's door?" Silly questions and their answers in police-suspect interrogations. *Discourse Studies, 10,* 89-111.

ten Have, P. (1991). Talk and institution: A reconsideration of the 'asymmetry' of doctor-patient interaction. In D. Boden & D. H. Zimmerman (eds.), *Talk and social structure: Studies in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis* (pp. 138-163). Cambridge: Polity Press.

ten Have, P. (2007). *Doing conversation analysis: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Trotter, C. (2009). Pro-social modelling. *European Journal of Probation, 1,* 142-152.

Wilkinson, H., Gallagher, M. & Smith, M. (2012). A collaborative approach to defining the usefulness of impact. *Evidence & Policy, 8,* 311–27.

Wilson, G. (2013). Evidencing reflective practice in social work education: Theoretical uncertainties and practical challenges. *British Journal of Social Work, 43,* 154-17.

Wooffitt, R. (2005). *Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: A comparative and critical introduction.* London: Sage.

Appendix: Transcription symbols

These symbols have been adapted from Jefferson (2004).

[ ]	Square brackets indicate overlapping speech. They are placed to indicate the position of the overlap.
(0.8)	Numbers in round brackets indicate pauses in seconds (in this case, eight-tenths of a second).
(.)	A full stop in rounded brackets indicates a micro pause (that is, a pause that is too short to time).
((name))	Double rounded brackets indicate actions or otherwise include notes from the transcriber.
(unclear)	Words in single brackets are unclear or indicate a 'best guess'.
yeah?	Question marks indicate a 'questioning' (i.e., rising) intonation.