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THE UNCOMMON SENSE IN YOUTH WORK:
A STUDY OF PRACTICE WISDOM IN
SOCIAL WORK RELATIONSHIP
WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

by

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ABSTRACT

Over the past century, the purpose of social work has been changing, and it has yet come to a consensus about the core mission of this profession. The relationship between social worker and service user has also been changed, to the service users as customers, the manager as the key, and the social workers as employees (Tsui & Cheung, 2004), due to the escalation in managerial control and reduction of practitioners’ professional autonomy (Lymbery, 2001; Murphy, Duggan, & Joseph, 2013). The changing roles of service users as consumers suggest that they no longer depend on “trust” but rather emphasize their “right” to services through contractual obligation (Smith, 2001). The purpose of social work is, and should always be, about relating with and trying to understand our service users (Howe, 1998). However, the importance of this purpose has been largely diminished as social work is professionalizing according to the standard of other disciplines, such as psychotherapy, medicine, science, etc. The professionality of social work is not as distinctive as its counterparts since its knowledge base (Trevithick, 2008) has yet been well established. Provided that the boundaries (Abbott, 1995) of our profession remain blurred, but we are striving for professional uniqueness at the same time, the “profession” of social work is conceptualized mainly according to the functionalist perspective. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why social workers are sometimes being downplayed as practicing according merely to general common sense.
Social worker is not a technocrat with the expertise in tackling human problems by applying only the procedural knowledge (Chu, Tsui, & Yan, 2009). Wise practitioners should be uncommonly good at being present and possess common sense to an uncommon degree (Powell, 2008). Only by this could they practice with this unusual sensitivity to start where the client is. For a competent and highly experienced social worker, intuition can never be avoided. He/she should practice according to a matter of intuitive understanding through the intersubjective encounter with service users. Practice wisdom in social work is not only a commonsensical basis of professional judgment but also a kind of uniquely uncommon practical sense among social workers in particular. Indeed, practitioners might face difficulties in discerning practice wisdom from practice experience, good practice, or common sense. There is an urgent need to address the knowledge gap by looking for evidences to substantiate that practice wisdom in social work is exceptional. Youth work was conceived as a showcase of relationship-based social work in this study. The author was interested in examining how social workers are able to connect with service users through a relationship with trust. By making references to soft evidences in youth work, this study aimed to pinpoint a controversial but important issue in practice, i.e. the practice wisdom in social work relationship.

In this study, a holistic understanding of practice wisdom was developed to address the contemporary crisis in social work. The author argued that the distinctiveness and professionality of social work could be found in the intersubjective encounters between social workers and service users. Practice wisdom was defined as a sensibly use
of self of a highly experienced social worker in the artistry of practice. It involved not only experiences and skills but also encompasses the moral senses of practitioners. Informants of this study explained that core ingredients of trustworthiness such as acceptance, companionship, and genuineness were crucial to a good relationship with service users. The trustworthiness in social work relationship provided practitioners with an invaluable opportunity to foster empathic understanding and helping alliance with their service users. Yet, it demanded a long-lasting engagement in developing such a strong feeling of togetherness. Practice wisdom in social work referred to the humanistic attitude and embodied sense that could only be cultivated by engaging with service users in an unconditional and person-centred social work relationship. The author intended to draw the attention of contemporary scholars, educators, and practitioners to determine how this important concept in social work can be defined and apprehended more explicitly.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why Youth Work?

1.2. The Scope of this Study

1.3. How does “Social Work” Work in Relationship-Based Practice?

1.4. In Search of Practice Wisdom

1.5. Significance of the Study

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Review of Local and Overseas Studies on Practice Wisdom

2.3. Key Components of Practice Wisdom in Social Work

   2.3.1. It is Intuitive, Tacit, and Spontaneous in Nature

   2.3.2. It is an Embodied Phronesis of Experienced Practitioners

   2.3.3. It has to be Cultivated through the Intersubjective Encounter
2.4. The Work of Art in Relationship-based Practice .................................................. 27
  2.4.1. A Kantian Conception of Aesthetics .......................................................... 31
  2.4.2. A Beautiful Portrait of Helping in Social Work ........................................... 34
  2.4.3. Aesthetics Experiences in Social Work ..................................................... 37
  2.4.4. Morality of Human Beings ........................................................................ 40
  2.4.5. Connecting Aesthetics with Morality .......................................................... 44
  2.4.6. The Relational Orientation in Social Work .................................................... 46
  2.4.7. From Kant to Tolstoy: The Use of a Social Worker’s Self ......................... 50

2.5. Youth Work in Overseas and Local Context ..................................................... 57
  2.5.1. Youth Work Defined .................................................................................. 57
  2.5.2. Youth Work: A Showcase of Relationship-Based Social Work ................. 58
  2.5.3. Social Work Services for Young People in Hong Kong ........................... 59
  2.5.4. Critical Issues Regarding Youth Work Practice in Hong Kong .............. 60

2.6. Summary ............................................................................................................ 62

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ............................................. 67

3.1. Bridging the Knowledge Gap between Theory and Practice ....................... 67
  3.1.1. The Theory Gap of Practice Wisdom in Social Work .............................. 67
  3.1.2. The Practice Gap of Practice Wisdom in Social Work ............................ 68

3.2. The Constitution of Relationship-based Social Work ................................... 70

3.3. The Conceptual Framework of this Study ...................................................... 73
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY................................. 76

4.1. Research Question............................................................................................................. 76
  4.1.1. Major Questions............................................................................................................. 76
  4.1.2. Corollary Questions..................................................................................................... 76
4.2. Research Design............................................................................................................... 77
4.3. Heuristic Research Methodology: A Brief Recapitulation........................................... 79
4.4. A Heuristic Inquiry of Practice Wisdom in Social Work.............................................. 80
4.5. Sampling.......................................................................................................................... 84
4.6. Characteristics of Informants .......................................................................................... 85
4.7. Coding.............................................................................................................................. 88
4.8. Limitations of the Study .................................................................................................. 89
4.9. Efforts to Ensure Trustworthiness................................................................................... 90
4.10. Practical Considerations in Heuristic Research......................................................... 92
4.11. Summary......................................................................................................................... 93

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS.................................................... 94

5.1. Roles of Social Worker in Youth Work Setting.............................................................. 94
  5.1.1. The Role of Social Worker as a “Friend” ................................................................. 94
  5.1.2. The Role of Social Worker as a “Mentor”................................................................. 95
  5.1.3. The Role of Social Worker as an “Idol”...................................................................... 96
  5.1.4. The Role of Social Worker as an “Authoritative Figure”........................................ 97
  5.1.5. The Role of Social Worker as a “Date” .................................................................... 99
5.1.6. The Role of Social Worker as a “Sibling” or “Relative” .................. 100
5.1.7. Similarities of Youth Work with other Non-Social-Work Settings . 101

5.2. The Attributes of a Good Relationship........................................... 102
  5.2.1. A Relationship that cannot be Confined to a Designated Duration.. 102
  5.2.2. A Relationship that should not be Confined to a Specific Context.. 103
  5.2.3. A Feeling of Togetherness ..................................................... 104
  5.2.4. Growing Up Together with the Young People ............................. 106
  5.2.5. The Importance of Commitment .............................................. 108
  5.2.6. A Respectful Encounter ....................................................... 109

5.3. Intervention Approaches and Strategies in Working with Young People.. 111
  5.3.1. Providing an Easy Platform that Caters for In-Depth Understanding .. 111
  5.3.2. Making Use of the Advantages of Youth Work Setting ................. 113
  5.3.3. A Skill-less Way in Doing Social Work ..................................... 114
  5.3.4. To Seize Hold of the “Informal” Moment in Doing “Formal” Things . 115
  5.3.5. Embedding Intervention in Daily Life Activities .......................... 117
  5.3.6. Genuine Expression of Emotions ............................................. 118
  5.3.7. Be Extraordinarily Patient ..................................................... 119
  5.3.8. Managing the Expectation of Others ........................................ 121
  5.3.9. A Long-Lasting Engagement .................................................. 122

5.4. Working With Young People in Social Work Groups ......................... 124
  5.4.1. Long-term Engagement in Social Work Groups ............................ 124
  5.4.2. Sense of Belonging and Achievement in the Group ...................... 125
5.5. The Necessary Qualities of a Youth Worker to Build Relationship

5.5.1. Curiosity

5.5.2. Genuineness

5.5.3. Sensitivity

5.5.4. Perspicacity

5.5.5. Non-authoritative

5.5.6. Acceptance

5.5.7. Charisma

5.6. The Quintessence of Youth Work

5.6.1. Knowing What We Come Into Social Work For

5.6.2. Unconditional Companionship

5.6.3. Trustworthiness in Social Work Relationship

5.6.4. Taking Account of Young People’s Stance

5.6.5. Purposiveness Without a Purpose

5.6.6. Elements of Qing (情) in Social Work Relationship

5.6.7. A Close Affinity between Social Workers and Service Users

5.6.8. Reciprocity in Social Work Relationship

5.6.9. An Invaluable Opportunity for Self-Contemplation

5.7. Summary
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION ................................................................. 152

6.1. Practice Wisdom, Social Work, and Art ........................................ 152
   6.1.1. Practice Wisdom Defined ..................................................... 152
   6.1.2. Practice Wisdom in Social Work Relationship with Young People 153
   6.1.3. The Use of Self of Social Workers ......................................... 154
   6.1.4. An Interplay of Relationships and Boundaries ....................... 156
   6.1.5. Art and Social Beauty ....................................................... 158

6.2. Youth Work as a Relationship-Based Social Work Practice ............. 164
   6.2.1. The Chemistry between Youth worker and Young People .......... 164
   6.2.2. Being Fully Present with the Young People ........................... 167
   6.2.3. The Action of Non-action (無為) in Youth Work ..................... 170

6.3. On Becoming a Youth Worker ................................................... 174
   6.3.1. The Youth Worker Temperament ......................................... 174
   6.3.2. Getting Along with Young People Genuinely ......................... 175
   6.3.3. Self-Cultivation of a Youth Worker ..................................... 178
   6.3.4. Fostering Genuine Healing in a Relationship with Genuine Love.. 179

6.4. Summary ................................................................................... 183
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...... 185

7.1. Summary of Findings and Analysis .............................................. 185

7.2. Recommendations ................................................................. 190

7.2.1. Implications for Youth Work in Hong Kong ......................... 190

7.2.2. Relationship-Based Social Work Practice Reconsidered .......... 191

7.2.3. Engaging Young People with Trust ....................................... 193

7.2.4. Towards a Refined Intervention Approach of Youth Work ...... 196

7.2.5. Implications for Social Work Education and Further Research ...... 199

7.3. Reflections ............................................................................. 200

7.3.1. Personal ............................................................................. 200

7.3.2. Professional ........................................................................ 201

7.3.3. Philosophical ....................................................................... 202

7.4. The Way Ahead: A Revival of Relationship-Based Social Work .. 202

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 206

APPENDIX 1 RESEARCH BRIEF .......................................................... 232

APPENDIX 2 LETTER OF CONSENT ............................................... 234
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why Youth Work?

Recent studies conducted by Pooler, Wolfer, and Freeman (2014a, 2014b) examine how social workers find joy in their work. They identify a list of interpersonal and intrapersonal sources, including making connections, making a difference, making meaning, and making a life that facilitate the active engagement of finding joy in social work practice. The study suggests that having an authentic, deep, and emotional engagement with a client is a major source of joy, and such a connection contributes to a meaningful part of the professional social work practice. Social workers are less likely to be able to find joy unless they are being with the clients and providing meaningful human companionship for their clients (Pooler, Wolfer, & Freeman, 2014a).

To me, and the informants of this study, youth work setting is definitely an ideal platform that a truly trustful relationship with the service users can be developed. As a practitioner who has committed more than ten years in this field, I have found a lot of joy in my daily encounter with the young people. It is not only because the service users are energetic or that they are able to cheer me up, but more importantly, I am honoured that I have the opportunity to act as one of their companions in their lives and walk through challenges and difficulties together. When I entered the field, I was only a few years older than many of my clients. It was at a time that I was rather green and inexperienced.
I have witnessed their growth and at the same time, they have witnessed mine. To them, I might be their companion; to me, they have always been my companions as well.

1.2. The Scope of this Study

In general, youth work refers to activities that intentionally seek to impact young people. It includes but not limited to services provided by social work practitioners, namely community youth work, centre-based youth work, faith-based youth work, outreach youth work, school-based work, and youth development etc. The informants of this study came from the Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres (ICYSCs), District Youth Outreaching Social Work Team (YOT), school social work service, and services for disengaged young people. It has covered the major service areas that hire registered social workers in providing remedial as well as developmental services for young people in Hong Kong. The scope of this study is limited to examining the voluntary relationship between social workers and young people. Hence, some of the statutory social work services, such as services for young offenders or rehabilitation services for drug abusers were excluded because young people do not usually receive these services on a voluntarily basis.

Youth work setting is an invaluable resource for ensuring the discovery of the tacit, spontaneous, and embodied practice wisdom of social workers. Especially between the voluntary contacts of social workers and clients, practice wisdom has to be utilized otherwise a successful relationship can hardly be established. Youth workers seek to maximize the opportunities to engage with clients, drawing from years of experience in
the field, and their embodied abilities to evaluate the intersubjective connections with young people. Despite their expertise and practice wisdom, the working scenarios of youth work setting remains highly uncertain. It in turn provides researchers with an excellent environment to explore how senior practitioners are able to cope with new challenges by their practice wisdom.

1.3. How does “Social Work” Work in Relationship-Based Practice?

The professionality of youth work has long been questioned and challenged. I considered youth work as an appropriate illustration of relationship-based social work activity in this study. One might argue that it is a truism to say social work cannot be made possible without relationship and has therefore heavily undermined the significance and uniqueness of the relational orientation in social work. However, relationship should not only be regarded as a means for social workers to get in touch with others. The understanding of relationship can be easily distorted by the pragmatic focus of practice. For example, in working with an unemployed young man, a “typical” workflow is as follows: first of all, the social worker engages with the youth and builds rapport with him; Secondly, they enter a contractual relationship that the client understands his rights and obligations; After that, the social worker formulates a treatment plan for the young man and talks to him from time to time in the counselling room until the objectives are achieved; The case is thus finally closed because the client has secured a job in the open market.
Notwithstanding the plausible workflow as described above, informants of this study suggest that youth work does not actually “work” that way. There were occasions that social workers and young people were seemingly doing nothing but only hanging around on shopping malls and street corners. They did not have straightforward agenda in some of their meetings. Indeed, most of them seldom mentioned that they used to meet their service users in the counselling room. In an extreme case, a social worker reported that he had once sat on the bed of his client in the first home visit for entirely four hours but without saying a word. It is not difficult to understand why the professionality of youth work has always been contested. However, to this group of highly experienced social work practitioners, they had a clear and definite understanding of what is actually going on.

1.4. In Search of Practice Wisdom

Earlier in the 1980s, academics have already been struggling between the implicit and explicit nature of knowledge in social work. Imre (1984; 1985) emphasizes the inseparable tacit dimension through social work research. Instead of merely adopting the premises of the philosophy of logical positivism in the nature of scientific research in general, she points out that both the practitioners and researchers are to be involved in bringing about complexity to social work research. As there is a tendency for practitioners and researchers to set up a dichotomy between objective data of scientific research and intuitive understanding of practice wisdom, she posits that there is an urgent need at that time to develop a different perspective on this problem, i.e. “a perspective
which would not disparage either the kind of knowledge often meant by practice wisdom or that which can be known through empirical techniques” (Imre, 1985, p.137).

Thirty years later, the demand for understanding practice wisdom of social work has not been diminished. Academics (Hackett & Taylor, 2013; Wallander, 2011) bring contemporary quantitative approaches of value to the research on social workers’ professional judgment. Nonetheless, such quantitative survey designs are not without limitation. It can hardly be used to study professional judgments of social workers in the context of a dynamic professional environment (Wallander, 2011). Moreover, in a complex, rich, and multifaceted settings, it is often difficult to opt for a research strategy that reduces this complexity to “simplified, spartan, single-factor settings” but without losing some of the key aspects and factors relating to the decision-making process (Hackett and Taylor, 2013).

Social workers are generally not opposed to the appeal of evidence-based practice (Okpych and Yu, 2014). Indeed, while academics have been preoccupied with empirical data, the soft, flexible, and spontaneous practice wisdom of practitioners has been downplayed or sacrificed. Tyson (1994) suggests that some of the social workers have found research based upon the positivist paradigm far from practical since the findings yield information that is irrelevant to their practical experience. Discussion of practice wisdom, including common sense, practice-based knowledge, tacit knowledge, and process knowledge, is not a new agenda in social work (Gray and Schubert, 2013). However, the research of practice wisdom is rarely discussed in social work literature. One assumption is that tacit knowledge is unreserchable. Unlike any laboratory results of randomized controlled trial, practice wisdom is rather invisible, neither by researchers
nor practitioners themselves. It remains debatable whether one could cognitively aware of the non-cognitive facet of one’s thought. However, professional decision makers should always be critically aware of and act upon the contexts in which the decisions are being made. Therefore, the embodied practice wisdom should appeal to a broader readership in social work research.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The formation of a substantial helping relationship depends largely on the extent to which social workers and service users can share, negotiate, compromise and resolve their moral differences (Goldstein, 1987). However, the present-day worker-client relationship is increasingly bounded by procedural guidelines, professional codes of conduct, and contractual obligations (Yan, Cheung, Chu, & Tsui et al., 2015). Social work has already been hi-jacked by technical competence and system confidence (Smith, 2001). In this context, a trustful relationship between social workers and service users can hardly be established.

Alongside the evidence-based movement (Okpych & Yu, 2014) that the academia is now zealously looking for more solid and concrete proof in justifying the effectiveness of social work, relationship, which refers to something that is important but hardly measurable, receives far less attention than other intervention approaches that “look like” much more therapeutic in nature. Core ingredients such as trust, respect, receptivity, sense of reciprocity, etc. are identified as the bases of relationship without controversy. Nevertheless, relationship is regarded (somewhat downplayed) as merely a descriptive
term to portray the harmonic state between social workers and service users. I disagree with this view and echo the assertion that the relational approach lies at the heart of social work (Howe, 1998; Murphy, Duggan, & Joseph, 2013; Ruch, Turney, & Ward, 2010; Tosone, 2004). Particular settings in youth work such as youth centre and outreaching services were selected in this study because young people are usually voluntarily engaged to youth workers in these service contexts. I am interested in why service users are willingly connected to social workers and how do these connections make a difference. A similar study was conducted earlier by Young (1999; 2006) in the context of UK. She sought to review the nature and purpose of young work by conducting qualitative interviews with a group of youth workers and young people. She concludes that youth work “is to engage with young people in the process of moral philosophizing through which they make sense of themselves and the world, increasingly integrate their values, actions and identity, and take charge of themselves as empowered human beings” (Young, 2006, p. 59).

In this study, I focused specifically on the relationship-based perspective in the youth work setting of Hong Kong. I summed up a list of key components as well as limitations of practice wisdom from the existing literature. I then redefined practice wisdom in social work as an uncommon sense that enabled the social worker to connect aesthetics and morality by the use of self. Referring to the findings of this study, I concluded that the professionality of youth work lies in its capability of establishing a solid and trustful relationship with the service users that can foster their personal growth. Relationship should not be a tactic that social workers use for facilitating further intervention. Instead, it refers to a specific state that real changes take place. I am
convinced that such a relational orientation could not only be applied to youth work settings. The use of youth work as an example helps practitioners and academics get a closer look at the essence of relationship and find its applicability in other service settings in social work.

Social work development in Hong Kong has been heavily influenced by the impact of neoliberalism and managerialism (Yan et al., 2015). In dealing with the consumer-driven and market-based environment in social services, frontline practitioners in youth work, as well as in other service settings, are getting more reluctant to be involved in typical social work interventions that demand a lot of time, energy, and effort but serving only a small number of service users. Instead, they are encouraged to engage in activities that could help agencies to earn extra “profit” and support service expansion. Service administrators are more willing to support practitioners to provide interventions that are of higher cost-effectiveness but with less social work elements. Practitioners are also getting confused and frustrated with “where should they stand?” At this particular juncture,

“frontline social workers and clients are being marginalized in light of the monetization of social services, social work managers’ power struggles, administrative control of social service providers, and the de-professionalization of social work” (Cheung, 2016, p. 3).

This study aim not only to recapitulate the purpose of social work (or merely youth work) in the chaotic contemporary times, but more importantly, to substantiate the assertion that “social work is art” at the outset. Only by this could social work be more sufficiently understood by service users and accurately defined by academics. Moreover,
by connecting the ideas of practice wisdom, aesthetics, and relationship in the social work context, it is believed that both the academia and the field can extend the discussion on how practitioners can be re-empowered and not being compromised by the value of money but refocus on the value of our moral core and the moral imperatives of love and care in humanistic social work practice.

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction of the study. It describes the scope of this study in brief and explains the reason for using youth work as a showcase of relationship-based social work practice. It also indicates the significance of this study in the youth work setting in Hong Kong. Chapter two presents a comprehensive literature review on a list of important concepts in social work, namely practice wisdom, aesthetics, art, and relationship-based practice. It also helps outlines the conceptual framework of this study. In this chapter, practice wisdom in social work is defined as an uncommon sense that enables the social worker to connect aesthetics and morality by the use of self. Key components of practice wisdom are identified, namely (1) it is intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature, (2) it is an embodied (somatic and affective) phronesis of experienced practitioners, and (3) it has to be cultivated through the intersubjective encounter between social workers and service users. Social work activity is considered an art per se because it depends largely on one’s embodied sensual perception. Chapter three includes the research questions, research design, methodology, and limitations of the study. Chapter four presents an analysis of the research findings, according to six major themes, i.e. roles of social worker in youth work setting, the
attributes of a good relationship, intervention approaches and strategies in working with young people, working with young people in social work groups, the necessary qualities of a youth worker, and the quintessence of youth work. The findings are further discussed in Chapter five in response to the research questions of this study. Chapter six is the concluding chapter of this thesis. It outlines the summary of findings and analysis and provides recommendations for youth work in Hong Kong, education and training, as well as further research areas. Last but not least, it also includes a section on personal reflections of the researcher.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

At this moment in time, social work is in the midst of a transformation into an evidence-based profession guided by social therapists practicing in a neo-liberal world (Long, 2011; Okpych & Yu, 2014; Reisch, 2013). However, social work and evidence-based practice are currently at a crossroads. Academics and practitioners are eager to substantiate the importance of social work and become more research minded (Barth et al., 2012; Fook, 2012; Stepney, 2009). It has already been a century since Flexner (1915) queried whether social work is or is not a profession, but the question has not yet been answered, although some progress has been made in this regard. Thus, the professionality of social work has yet to be as solidly justified as its cognate counterparts, such as psychotherapy or family therapy. Utilitarianism has driven mainstream social work down a dead-end path, recasting its practitioners as service-oriented, rational-technical professionals in the process. The state and service agencies hire specific social workers to work in specific settings, offering their services to specific groups of clients. Many of the clients’ problems are analysed by checklists and solved according to pre-set protocols.

A person-centred orientation is considered untenable in statutory social work service (Murphy, Duggan, & Joseph, 2013), and social workers are trained and grouped according to their specialties. The introduction of neoliberalism and managerialism has driven evidence-based practice (EBP) further away from being merely a “paradigm for
social work education and practice” (Okpych & Yu, 2014, p. 3). Reisch (2013) argues that emphasis on improving the effectiveness of social work intervention by conducting sophisticated quantitative research has strengthened “the competitive position of the profession in the occupational and academic marketplace and to generate additional funding from both the public and private sectors” (p. 721). There is already “a shift within policymaking circles towards fiscal austerity and policies that emphasize market-oriented and individually-focused solutions” (Reisch, 2013, p. 715). The connection of EBP to performance management is expected by administrators to ensure the control of social work and it is clearly consistent with the managerialist agenda (Harlow et al., 2013).

2.2. Review of Local and Overseas Studies on Practice Wisdom

A review of existing literature shows that social work scholars have long considered empirical evidence to be just one aspect of what should inform social work practice. Soft evidence is as important as the hard, quantifiable, and scientific data in contemporary evidence-based social work activity. Soft evidence, including impressions, feelings, conjecture of informants, and hunches of professionals can be meaningful clinical clues (Murdach, 2010). The knowledge base of social work is composed of theoretical knowledge, factual knowledge, and practice/practical/personal knowledge (Trevithick, 2008). For professionals who do things with, to, and for other people, practitioner-generated knowledge is used in order to make book knowledge relevant and useful (Trevithick, 2008; Whan, 1986). Practice-based knowledge is a consistent theme in
social work literature that includes common sense, practice wisdom, tacit knowledge, and process knowledge, and professional action in social work is “seen to be guided by a form of knowledge different from scientific knowledge” (Gray & Schubert, 2013, p. 341).

All knowledge can be “transformed into social work knowledge when it can be used in practice” (Allen-Meares & DeRoos, 1994, p. 40). Tyson (1994) examines why caseworkers are reluctant to pursue scientific research in social work. She finds that social workers are misinformed that practice wisdom is not scientific enough. However, they also regard positivistic research as impractical since the findings yield information that is irrelevant to their direct practices. Although practice wisdom is viewed by some positivists as a subordinate to empirically validated evidence (Dybicz, 2004). On the contrary, Goldstein (1992) emphasizes the in vivo qualities of practitioners in filtering the social work theories and reflecting on their relevance as wisdom in practice. Gray and Schubert (2013) further propose that “[t]his raises awareness of the need for researchers and practitioners to find ways to more effectively move research to practice and thus refine and reinforce the shape and impact that social research has at the practice level” (p. 344).

Practice wisdom is, indeed, a slippery concept. Imre (1984) first sparked the debate on whether or not social work knowledge can be defined scientifically by raising the possibility of a broader epistemology that should be capable of encompassing all of the dimensions of what it means to be human. Her work emphasizes the limits of logical empiricism as a philosophy of science for social work. She argues that the process of establishing social work scholarship cannot be restricted to data analysis and mathematical techniques. It is necessary for practitioners and researchers to deal with
underlying epistemological issues in order to move to a deeper and more creative level of social work research on practice wisdom. Imre (1985) expanded the discussion further in her article, “*Tacit Knowledge in Social Work Research and Practice.*” She gained insights from the concept of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958, 1966) and removed some of the obstacles that might hinder productive communication between practitioners and researchers. Although there was a tendency to accept the premises of logical positivism in social science at that time, she contends that both existentialism and phenomenology could have been discussed as frameworks potentially leading to a better philosophical foundation of social work research.

Boehm (1958) summarizes that (1) tested knowledge, (2) hypothetical knowledge, and (3) practice wisdom, are the core ingredients of the scientific base of social work. Unlike hypothetical knowledge that requires transformation into tested knowledge, practice wisdom or assumptive knowledge requires “transformation into hypothetical then thence into tested knowledge” (p. 11). Practice wisdom in social work is often equated with common sense (Barker, 1999) and social work is sometimes being considered as a “practice of common sense.” In light of its vulnerable and vague peculiarities, the common sense has been mistakenly downgraded to folk opinion, folk theory (Rescher, 2005), or lay wisdom (Sheppard & Ryan, 2003). However, as Powell (2008) points out, “contrary to the *Social Work Dictionary*’s definition [of practice wisdom], other definitions of wisdom do not equate it with common sense but assert that common sense is itself a complex concept and an essential as well as instrumental component of wisdom” (p. 94).
Common sense, which is known as koinē aisthēsis back to the age of Aristotle, is not an easy concept in itself. It refers to a capacity of higher-order perceptual operation in uniting the five senses (Gregoric, 2007). Rescher (2005, p. 23) carefully distinguishes commonsensical knowledge from common knowledge that the former is “what everyone should know” but the latter is “what everyone does know.” Such a powerful rhetoric (Green, 2000) creates space for mutually-agreed consensus, which is self-evident, that another person can hardly resist. DeRoos (1990) emphasizes its “general robustness” following the study of judgmental biases. Whether or not common sense is innate (Thiele, 2006) is arguable, but it is also arguable that “it develops over time, as a product of experience” (p. 96). Rescher (2005) further dissects this particular mental capacity into three distinct but interrelated ideas, namely observational, judgmental and consensual common sense.

Practice wisdom is by no means a rigorous concept in local and overseas literature. Tyson (1994) argues that one cannot equate practice wisdom with practitioner knowledge so as to imply that the former is “inherently less scientific than the knowledge generated by researchers” (p. 737). Practice wisdom is defined by Klein and Bloom (1995) as “a personal and value-driven system of knowledge that emerges out of the transaction between the phenomenological experience of the client situation and the use of scientific information” (p. 801). It cannot only translate value-driven practice experience into communicable terms, but also scientific findings into practice principles (Klein & Bloom, 1995). Referring to O’Sullivan (2005), practice wisdom can be the unreliable, personal and idiosyncratic knowledge derived from practice experiences. However, it can also be the ability to handle difficulty, complexity, and uncertainty by making sound judgments.
Although practitioners often relied on practice wisdom or intuition in their selection of interventions (Burke & Early, 2003), practice wisdom is not always as wise as expected (Kessler, Gira & Poertner, 2005; Scott, 1990). It echoes with the findings of Zeira and Rosen (2000) that the usefulness of such an implicit, haphazard and disorganized wisdom may exceed its reputation. Dybicz (2004) points out that practice wisdom has a peculiar status, i.e. being recognized and ignored, even though “social work is unique among the social sciences in adopting the term” (p. 197). However, for Powell (2008), the meaning of practice wisdom is never as simple as it sounds.

In Hong Kong, the phrase “practice wisdom” is usually used interchangeably with “good practice” and “practice experience”. To the best of my knowledge, there are very few local studies that focus specifically on clarifying the concept of practice wisdom in social work. Tsang (2008) is among the few local academics who have discussed about the concept of practice wisdom in literature. He relates the Aristotelian understanding of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) to practice wisdom in social work. He applies the concepts of *kairos*, i.e. qualitative time, and *chromos*, i.e. quantitative time, and defines practice wisdom as doing the right thing at the right time in social work. For most social work practitioners, the understanding of practice wisdom has been oversimplified. It is because the distinction between practice wisdom and “the knowledge gained from practice experience” (Dybicz, 2004, p. 197) is unclear. With reference to Maxwell (2007), one thing for sure is that wisdom can help you to avoid doing something wrong. It includes but also goes beyond knowledge and understanding. As for Tiberius and Swartwood (cited in Bortolotti, 2011, p.300), “wisdom is the will and the ability to make good choices and help guide others to do so in virtue of a deep understanding of complex
human problems that one has arrived at through reflection and experience.” In the following section, I am going to summarize the key components of practice wisdom in social work and address the knowledge gap, theory gap, and practice gap from the existing literature.

2.3. Key Components of Practice Wisdom in Social Work

2.3.1. It is Intuitive, Tacit, and Spontaneous in Nature

Tacit knowing is defined as commonplace acts by Polanyi (1966) that one is able to do something but unable to explain how. He asserts that tacit knowing, which is neither initially analytical nor cognitive, can be found in the act of doing. Being inspired by Polanyi, Imre (1984, 1985) links up tacit knowledge and practice wisdom in social work. She highlights that there is a dichotomy between scientific knowledge and practice wisdom. According to Imre (1985), tacit knowledge also “present in the intuition usually referred to as part of practice wisdom” (p. 147). In human services, the Dreyfusian five-stage model of skill acquisition (Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1984, 1986) is commonly adopted as an illustration of the interplay of tacit and explicit knowledge among practitioners from novice to expert. The earlier model published in the 1980s is used fairly widely to provide a means of assessing and supporting progress in the development of skills or competencies, and to provide a definition of acceptable level for the assessment of competence or capability. Among the three types of tacit knowledge categorized in his book “Tacit and Explicit knowledge”, the Polanyian one is referred to as somatic tacit knowledge rather than relational or collective tacit knowledge.
Based on the conceptualization of tacit knowing by Polanyi (1958, 1966), Imre (1984, 1985) introduces practice wisdom as a type of tacit knowledge in social work, and this tacit nature of practice wisdom is recognized in later studies (DeRoos, 1990; Scott, 1990; Zeira & Rosen, 2000). Drawing from the famous example of Polanyi, i.e. balancing on a bicycle, Collins (2010) argues that humans can sometimes do things better than cats, dogs, trees and sieves, but also vice versa. It is of the utmost importance to specify the nature of knowledge instead of mistakenly seeing all problems of human knowledge acquisition as problems of knowledge. He attempts to demystify the Polanyian conception and the Dreyfusian fashion by suggesting that, “[t]here is nothing philosophically profound about somatic tacit knowledge, and its appearance of mystery is present only because of the tension of the tacit with the explicit” (Collins, 2010, p. 117). Therefore, it is understandable that O’Sullivan (2005) criticizes practice wisdom as the unreliable, personal and idiosyncratic knowledge that derives from practice experiences. In the same vein, scholars such as Okpych and Yu (2014), who energetically contend that social work must become an empirically grounded rather than authority-based profession along the path of the EBP movement, tend to undermine the merit of practice wisdom.

Although the tacit dimension of social work practice wisdom is important, the critics’ concern should also need to be addressed. In fact, the distinction between practice wisdom and the knowledge gained from practice experience is blurry (Collins, 2010; Dybicz, 2004). Hudson (1997) categorizes practice wisdom as one form of professional knowledge in social work, asserting that practice wisdom should be conceptualized, codified and incorporated into theory. Past success with practitioner habits, such as what is said, how it is said, eye contact, or body posture, adds veracity to social work
profession (DeRoos, 1990). However, the understanding of practice wisdom as a form of professional knowledge or a collection of practitioner habits is incongruous. It should rather be referred as good practices or best examples.

I agree that practice wisdom in social work is intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature. Nevertheless, these are the necessary but not sufficient conditions of practice wisdom since these three characteristics are not enough to define practice wisdom. There are types of knowledge in social work that is intuitive, tacit or spontaneous in nature but should not be regarded as practice wisdom. For example, a highly experienced social worker is well-trained and experienced in dealing with street sleepers. He knows all the necessary procedures and is able to make beneficial referrals for the service users. He communicates well with the street sleepers because he can use their jargons and slang terms naturally. His responses to them are instantaneous and intuitive, based primarily upon his previous experiences in handling similar cases. In many occasions, he finds it difficult to explain his reaction in an explicit way. Indeed, to my knowledge, the account of practice wisdom in such way has been limited to a somewhat surface-level description of its characteristics rather than embodying and explication of the philosophical underpinnings and epistemological assumptions. Practice wisdom in social work not only involves skills and experiences but also encompasses the moral senses of practitioners. I will relate the conception of phronesis to practice wisdom in order to give a better explanation in the next section.
2.3.2. It is an Embodied *Phronesis* of Experienced Practitioners

Practitioners, including human service, law and medical professionals, have plenty of disquiets over the technical-rational approaches and theoretical excellence (Chu & Tsui, 2008; Goldstein, 1992; Taylor & White, 2006). It has been a call for revolution against the notion that human mind is merely analytical, rational, and logical (Gowdy, 1994). Technical-rationalism has not only influenced the paradigms over social work research that minimal focus has been put on non-cognitive and embodied ways of knowing (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012), but also social work’s educational traditions and academic tasks (Papell & Skolnik, 1992). Kinsella (2010) pinpoints that Schön (1983) rejects technical rationality and proposes an epistemology of practice, posits embodied reflection, recognizes the significance of frames in professional practice, and espouses the artistry of practice. She also reports that reflective practice does offer her with an antidote to the traditional scientific paradigm in health care industry. As noted in the previous section, practice wisdom of social work is tacit and spontaneous in nature (DeRoos, 1990; Imre, 1985; Scott, 1990; Zeira & Rosen, 2000).

The understanding of social work as an art form has been “influenced by the work of Schön, which led to a heavy emphasis on critical reflection and social workers’ attempts to make sense of their actions or understand the situations of and their encounters with clients” (Gray & Schubert, 2013, p. 341). Schön (1983) argues that professional practice, such as social work, is often dominated by non-technical and non-rational processes as technical-rationality hinders insightful identification of problems and creative search of solutions. The first concept, knowing-in-action, suggests that an individual is tacitly learning and doing. The professional knowledge resides in the action
but not precedes it (Schön, 1983). It involves the intelligent use of one’s mind and body together in response to the outer environment (Gowdy, 1994). Skilled practitioner does not intuitively know what or how to do until he/she comes to action. On the contrary, reflecting-in-action refers to “reflecting on knowing-in-action” (Schön, 1983, p.276). Practitioner should be able to act, reflect and make necessary change spontaneously (DeRoos, 1990). Practitioner should have a sense of rush and does not have plenty of time to stop and think while performing and reflecting. Practice wisdom of social work lies in such a second level of knowing, i.e. reflecting-in-action. It cannot be realized unless the social worker can discern, respond, and reflect simultaneously without any preexisting solutions in mind.

Social workers with practice wisdom should be well-equipped with the capabilities to develop on-the-spot mini-hypotheses (Klein & Bloom, 1995) and make ethical decisions spontaneously (Goldberg, 2005). Tsang (2008) applies the concepts of *kairos*, i.e. qualitative time, and *chromos*, i.e. quantitative time, to social work practice. He emphasizes the importance of capturing the right timing for a particular action. Social workers are reminded that “the right action has to be taken in the right place, and at the right time” (p. 131).

Back to the age of Aristotle, *phronesis* (i.e. practical wisdom) has already been discussed in the *Book Six of Nicomachean Ethics* that, it is a “true characteristic that is bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being.” Besides practical wisdom, the Greek word *phronesis* (*phronēsis*) can be translated to prudence (Eikeland, 2008) or practical common sense. Practical wisdom, hereinafter referred to as *phronesis* (in order to avoid confusion with practice wisdom),
will be discussed in accordance with its implications to practice wisdom in social work. Similar to practice wisdom, *phronesis* is no less a slippery concept (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012). Ellett (2012) outlines that *phronesis* is a virtue and an embodied social practice that involves non-calculative judgment. It is comprised of complicated interactions between the general and practical with reference to internal goods and excellences. Unlike technique, *phronesis* is not learnable, nor can it be forgotten.

Whan (1986) aligns social work practice with *phronesis* by defining the daily encounter with client as a practical-moral involvement. Drawing upon the work of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, he posits that *phronesis* is the moral consciousness of the right living or the “common good” (Colman, 2013; Keys, 2006; Küpers, 2013) in general. Ellett (2012) describes such a moral essentialism of humankind as the first philosophy that is fixed, timeless, and universally necessary. Therefore, *phronesis* is uniquely classified by Aristotle that it is an intellectual virtue that implies ethics (Eikeland, 2008; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012). Kemmis (2012) further proposes that a longing for *praxis* could better describe our longing for *phronesis* and wisdom. According to Küpers (2013),

“There are two kinds of practices: poïesis, which is guided by tekhne; and the more comprehensive praxis, which is guided by phronesis… As phronesis is used in and for praxis as acting for the common good, it manifests a situated practical reasoning, knowledge and habit, which directs action for acting well (eupraxia) and living well (euzen)” (p. 22).
Praxis, which is a prerequisite for phronesis (Kemmis, 2012), refers to a particular kind of action which is morally-committed, morally-oriented and morally-informed (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). On the other hand, tekhnē is a term often translated as craftsmanship, craft, or art. Tekhnē-focused knowledge is the “knowing how to” by applying a replicable skill or techniques whereas phronesis concerns with actions that is used for “knowing how to” live fully (Küpers, 2013). For Eikeland (2008), “poîesis makes things, praxis makes perfect” (p. 122). Phronesis is about “making the right use of knowledge and preferential choices or judgments for the prudentially doable actions of humans as rational, social and political animals” (Küpers, 2013, p. 20).

Phronesis implies the significance of both tacit and explicit form of reflection. It emphasizes deliberative reflection and the reflection that is revealed through action (Kinsella, 2012). Through the integration of a logical, abstract, embodied engagement with the world, it gains experiences in a holistic way (Eikeland, 2008). Embodied phronesis, according to Küpers (2013), “involves sensing, perceiving, making choices and realizing actions that display appropriate and creative responses under challenging circumstances through bodily ways of engagement” (p. 24). Game (1997) suggests that the emotions and body are closely intertwined in embodied knowing. It refers to a constant flow of senses and the experiences vary among individuals. Küpers (2013) supports that “being embodied means that practitioners are dynamically incarnated in and mediated through mundane experiences, actions and passions” (p. 24).

Aristotle’s “practical wisdom” (i.e., phronesis) has always been found in social work literature (Thompson & West, 2013; Tsang, 2008; Whan, 1986). It is a conception that has often been used interchangeably with practice wisdom. Originating in “The
Nichomachean Ethics”, *phronesis* was defined as “prudence”, “practical wisdom”, or “practical common sense” (Whan, 1986) and refers to an intellectual virtue that implies ethics (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012). It focuses on “making the right use of knowledge and preferential choices or judgements for the prudentially doable actions of humans as rational, social and political animals” (Küpers, 2013, p. 20). Using *phronesis*, social workers can discern what is morally good and desirable in a particular practical situation (Tsang, 2008). Putting *phronesis* in the context of social work can highlight the tacit, intuitive, value-driven, and embodied practical reasoning processes of human service practitioners. Nonetheless, this use of *phronesis* is unable to address the uniqueness of social work and differentiate it from other human service professions.

Social work is a unique profession that emphasizes establishing relationships as the fundamental entry point to any successful intervention. Without successful engagement with clients, social work is not possible. The discussion of practice wisdom in the previous literature has omitted this important stage. Social work functions to help solve clients’ problems, but the problems cannot be truly solved unless these clients are actively engaged with their social workers. I propose that the distinctiveness of practice wisdom in social work lies in the intersubjective encounters between social workers and service users.

### 2.3.3. It has to be Cultivated through the Intersubjective Encounter

Oakeshott (1962) distinguishes the Aristotelian practical wisdom from “technical knowledge.” Likewise, Gadamer (1960) also makes clear distinctions between *phronesis*
and technique. For Aristotle, a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. It should be generated from practice, experience and reflection and cannot be acquired by method and rule-governed skill (Tsang, 2008). For being a professionally wise practitioner, Sellman (2012) regards *phronesis* as a significant ingredient in professional competence that involves self-awareness or self-revelation. Kinsella (2010) suggests that the art of reflective practice in the health and social care professions has the potential to move practitioners and policy makers towards *phronesis*. To this end, Kinsella (2012, pp. 48-49) names a list of possible criteria towards *phronetic* or wise judgment in professional practice, namely (1) pragmatic usefulness, (2) persuasiveness, (3) aesthetic appeal, (3) ethical imperatives, (4) dialogic intersubjectivity, and (5) transformative potential.

Practice wisdom in social work is more likely a practical reasoning (Tsang, 2008) and virtuous habit (Küpers, 2013). It also refers to a tacit, embodied and sensual relation to the world (Roca, 2007). Fifteen years after the famous Dreyfus five-stage model of skill acquisition is introduced (Benner, 1984; Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1984; 1986), Dreyfus (2001) adds the stage six and seven, namely mastery, and practical wisdom respectively on top of his renowned frame of reference of expertise and practical knowledge. He also emphasizes strongly on the importance of apprenticeship and bodily presence. As noted in Dreyfus (2001, p. 172), “[i]t is only by being an apprentice to one’s parents and teachers that one gains what Aristotle calls practical wisdom - the general ability to do the appropriate thing, at the appropriate time, in the appropriate way.”

The learning experience for being an expert should be embodied, i.e. somatic and affective. Instead of evaluating and analyzing those objective descriptions of situations, students can hardly grasp the essence behind making a professional choice without
actually feeling the joys and disappointments of senior officials who are making similar decisions in the real world (Dreyfus, 2001). However, it is not the process of turning an apprentice to a copy of the master. But rather, it is to force an apprentice to develop his/her own style.

As value-rationality has increasingly given way to instrumentalist rationality, Kinsella and Pitman (2012) call for a reconceptualization of professional knowledge that draws on *phronesis* as a moral and intellectual virtue. Social workers with practice wisdom possess the moral will and moral skill to determine what has to be done in a particular situation (Schwartz, 2011). They are able to discern between the excellence of mind and excellence of character in the judgment-making process (Eikeland, 2008). Such a kind of wisdom can only be acquired indirectly (Kemmis, 2012). However, it is not the wisdom of analytic experience, but the wisdom or a quality characterized by courtesy, kindness, consideration, compassion and benevolence (Colman, 2013).

A social worker would be able to encounter reflecting-in-action in emotionally rich scenarios (Eraut, 2004). It is therefore not only to equip a social worker with practitioner habits such as skills and experiences. Rather, it is to develop a social worker in becoming an emotionally rich individual in the real life. In a nutshell, practice wisdom in social work is “context-dependent, action-oriented and based on a sort of value-rationality” (Tsang, 2008, p. 134). Practice wisdom is not the kind of virtue to be developed merely through discussion, lecturing and knowing (Eikeland, 2008). Instead, it has to be gradually nurtured through the process of socialization and inculcation by the virtuous others. It involves a “flexible relationship between general, universal knowledge and particular facts or circumstances of daily life” (Breier & Ralphs, 2009, p. 490). By
emphasizing the importance of relationships that remain at the heart of social work practice (Ruch et al., 2010), the intersubjective context of the helping relationship serves as the principal vehicle for generating clients’ changes (Tosone, 2004).

2.4. The Work of Art in Relationship-based Practice

In this study, practice wisdom in social work can be defined as follows: An uncommon sense that enables the social worker to connect aesthetics and morality by the use of self. As I have noted in the previous chapter, there are some limitations in the existing understanding of practice wisdom. By referring to an array of related literature, a list of key components of practice wisdom in social work is identified. In a nutshell, (1) it is intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature, (2) it is an embodied (somatic and affective) phronesis of experienced practitioners, and (3) it has to be cultivated through the intersubjective encounter between social workers and service users. Social work activity is an art since it involves not only the use of one’s cognitive judgment but depends largely on one’s embodied sensual perception, including both somatic and affective responses. The academia has yet come to a consensus on whether social work is a science or art. However, instead of adopting the middle ground that social work is both art and science (Bent-Goodley, 2015), I would argue that social work activity is an art per se, despite the fact that science can also play a part in some areas.

For instance, we would prefer to define mathematics as a discipline of science rather than art, although one might argue that mathematics can also be in some way artistic in nature. As remarked by Kant (1790/2007), there is a feeling of absolute
greatness known as the mathematical sublime when we encounter something overwhelming in size. Thinking of when we are standing on the edge of a cliff and looking at the ocean, we would derive an aesthetical comprehension of the beautiful scene from knowing that there is an uncountable (almost infinite) unit of water molecules in front of us. Mathematics is, nevertheless, a science, because it is the study of topics that helps resolves the truth and falsity by using one’s cognitive judgment. In a different vein, we would define piano playing as a discipline of art rather than science, although one might also argue that music can be in some way scientifically analyzed. Such as Pythagoras, an ancient Greek philosopher and mathematician in the late 6th century BC, studied the connection between music and science by examining the principles of harmonics. However, after all, we would be more likely to regard music as an art form that allows us to convey emotions and meanings. As can be seen in both examples mentioned above, despite the effort being made by Kant and Pythagoras, we would not categorize mathematics as art or piano playing as science.

Social work is one of the earliest human service professions to recognize the artistic and aesthetic aspects of practice (Reamer, 1993). However, “social work rarely includes discussion of art in the formal sense and rarely explores the extent to which professional practice meets commonly accepted criteria for what constitutes an art form” (Reamer, 1993, p. 161). Among the five philosophical foundations of social work, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been given to aesthetics, in contrast to political philosophy, moral philosophy, logic, and epistemology (Reamer, 1993). It has long been an estrangement to differentiate the artistry of social work practice from science (Bent-Goodley, 2015). Richmond (1917) is one of the earliest known scholars to
address the artistic aspects of social work. Besides Richmond, Goldstein (1992) identifies Hugh England, Max Siporin, and Maxine Greene as early theorists who define social work as an art form. Discussion on the artistry of practice (Schön, 1983) has also been extended to practice wisdom. Although it is widely recognized that social work possesses artistic features, Reamer (1993) points out that “social workers’ discussions of the artistic and aesthetic aspects of practice have been strikingly superficial” (p. 159).

In order to escape from the empiricist's critiques, practitioners often equate the vagueness of practice with the artfulness of social work. Such a pessimistic stance not only endangers the credibility of our profession, but also drives the debate towards a dead end. Schubert (2012) presents a chronology of ideas and surrounding debates about art in social work. From Jane Addams in 1889 to Ephrat Huss in 2009, 31 important articles are identified. It was stated by Schubert (2012) that “the social work literature relating to art has been dominated by a practice focus” (p. 138). Over the century, the emphasis of social work as an art has been pragmatically redirected to the discussion of the use of art in social work. In that sense, the aesthetic judgment of social workers could have been misinterpreted as a prerequisite of the art therapy. To emphasize the instrumental use of art in human services will further distort the philosophical assertion of social work as an art and overlook the importance of aesthetics in practice.

Goldstein (1990) considers practice wisdom and artistry as dependable sources of knowledge in social work. He asserts that “active social work practice is far more an art than an applied science. Reflectively, creatively, and imaginatively, the mind of the practitioner strives to blend and incorporate fragments of theory, information, intuitions, sensations, and other perceptions into something ambiguously called understanding” (p.
41). For social work sometimes downplayed as a common sense practice, the Kantian interpretation of sensus communis (Gemeinsinn) rejuvenates the debate by looking at commonsense judgment in an aesthetic way.

“I say that taste can with more justice be called a sensus communis ... Taste is, therefore, the faculty of judging a priori the communicability of the feelings that, without the mediation of a concept, are connected with a given representation” (Kant, 1790/2007, p. 125).

Social work is beautiful (Morén, 1994), but I am not going to justify the assertion that “social work activity is an art” by arguing that social work is and should be beautiful. It is the same as we cannot define the act of painting as art by simply judging whether the ultimate product is beautiful or not. The act of painting is an art as long as the artist is capable of conveying emotions and meanings to his/her audiences through this activity. Painting can still be an art even though the artist does not paint something beautiful every time. Considering an activity as art does not guarantee products that conform to specific harmonic form and structure are to be developed. If so, that is not art at all, but only a lovable creation that is developed based on a set of predetermined criteria. Consider the one of a kind masterpiece “Mona Lisa” painted by Leonardo da Vinci, it is, definitely, a beautiful artwork. However, for the counterfeiters who produce fake paintings of “Mona Lisa”, no matter how similar the products are when comparing to the real one, the activity of counterfeiters will not be considered as an art. When we are appreciating the “Mona Lisa” at the Louvre Museum, we would certainly be pleased and moved by the delicate strokes of da Vinci’s brush. But imagine if we were suddenly told that the masterpiece in
front of us was proved to be nothing but a copycat of the original painting, how would we react? Does it possess the same artistic value anymore? The answer is definitely no.

Putting that into the context of social work, it does not help us to consider social work activity as art even though practitioners believe that they are able to replicate beautiful products of other practitioners in an identical way. The reason for going to the Louvre Museum in Paris to stand in front of the original paintings of da Vinci as well as other masters is not only to get a closer look into the details of these paintings. Yet, it can now be easily achieved by looking for the digital image of these paintings online. The reason for getting closer to the original paintings is about establishing an authentic connection with the artist. Therefore, art, as experience, is relational (Dewey, 1980). More precisely, it refers to the authentic connection between people. That is, in the words of Tolstoy (1898/1994), a means of union by connecting different individuals together in the same feelings.

2.4.1. A Kantian Conception of Aesthetics

Before moving on to associate Tolstoy’s ideas about art with social work, it is necessary to differentiate art from aesthetics at the outset. Aesthetics, which stress the importance of aesthetic values, is the philosophy of art. It refers to the study of beauty and taste by aesthete who is versed in dealing with the beautiful, the ugly, and the sublime. The word, aesthetics, is derived from the Ancient Greek word aisthetikos, which refers to sensory, sentient, sensitive, or things that are pertaining to sense perception. It can be used interchangeably with the word “esthetics” as there is no difference between
them. Longinus (trans. Boileau, 1674), an ancient Greek scholar, calls attention to distinguish between the beauty and sublimity in oratory and poetry, in light of the decay of rhetoric due to the absence of personal freedom and corruption of morals. No matter whether imitating a beautiful object or imitating an object beautifully, he stresses that the beautiful is different from the sublime in that the latter originates in the powerful mind of the orator and poet. The sublime effect on the listener refers to a connection to the orator or poet’s emotions, styles and arrangements of the composition.

Immanuel Kant wrote the *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* in 1763 after *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke in 1757. He later develops his ideas further to “the analytic of aesthetic judgment” in the classic *Critique of Judgment* in 1790. Kant argues that beauty can only be experienced by a rational being and the exercise of reason is incomplete without the experience of beauty. He suggests that aesthetic judgment is different from rational argument. It is subjective, non-conceptual, but universally communicable. This subjective judgment is based only on what pleases and what displeases us through feeling (Kant, 1790/2007). For something to be considered truly beautiful, it should also represent truth and goodness at the same time (Li & Cauvel, 2006). Otherwise, neither the artists nor the audience would be interested in it. However, one can never be an expert in aesthetic judgement simply by listening to what others have said about beauty but without having the experiences him/herself (Scruton, 2011). The judgement of beauty has to be first hand and of great sentimental value. For instance, how music is heard and understood depends largely on the aesthetic sensibility of artists. However, we are not talking about the piece of music that is harmonious in terms of the
relationships between different notes and pitches only. Rather, the pleasure in beauty is a subjective state (Gilbert, 2006) grounded in experiences instead of rational argument (Scruton, 2011). Kant (1790/2007) coined the phrase “disinterested pleasure” to describe this specific state of mind. He argues that one has to set aside all desires, reasons, practical considerations, and goals but attend to the object purely and disinterestedly. Disinterested pleasure is not the pleasure from the object but in the object, which is “contemplative, feeding upon the presented form of its object, and constantly renewing itself from that source” (Scruton, 2011, p. 26).

In short, what Kant is trying to do is to define it more clearly for example when we say things like: “She is a beautiful old lady.” For Kant, the aesthetic judgment has four distinctive features, namely disinterested, universal, necessary, and purposive without purpose. Our aesthetic judgment towards the old lady is disinterested. We find pleasure in ourselves because we judge her beautiful. We do not judge this old lady as beautiful because we like her. Her beauty has universal validity although we make the judgment personally. There is a common sense among us that help judge her beauty through our feelings in common. We find her face full of meaning to us and we have a feeling of satisfaction when we are looking at her. However, we are not making a cognitive judgment to see if she matches a checklist of necessary and sufficient conditions for being a beautiful lady. At the end, we would experience pleasure when we gaze at a beautiful old lady, but we are unable to find a concept to rightly and fully summarize what we are seeing. The old lady should affect us as if she had a purpose, although no particular purpose can be found. There is no “going after” of this
appreciation and it is different from the sexual desire that drives us to contemplate our companions.

Callender (2005) relates the aesthetic term “disinterestedness” to practice and suggests that “a positive view of self should include a sense of intrinsic, noncontingent human value, that is, one that does not depend on one's value to others” (Callender, 2005, p. 288). He explains that “both psychotherapy and the arts deal with a particular combination of feeling and cognition that we call aesthetic judgement” (Callender, 2005, p. 289) and further asserts that patients in psychiatric practice are typically dominated by drabness and ugliness in their lives. Connecting with therapists allows these patients to experience treatment with moral dignity. It is the therapists’ duty to assist patients in rising above the miserable visions of their lives and life in general by uniting aesthetics and morality.

2.4.2. A Beautiful Portrait of Helping in Social Work

“Aesthetic experience is an expression of one’s self, of one’s creativity, imagination, intuition, intelligence and wisdom, of how one relates to people and to the world... A social worker’s artistry helps a client develop and aesthetic experience that enables the needed, desired, experiential, transformative changes in the helping process” (Siporin, 2009, p. 65).

“To perceive things aesthetically” is, by all means, an abstract idea. For instance, if we look up at the sky, we describe the colour as blue, but in fact it is not purely blue at
all, and when we look down at a shadow in the dark, it is also not purely black. As the renowned French Impressionist master Pierre-Auguste Renoir once said, *No shadow is black. It always has a colour.* For Oscar-Claude Monet, the founder of French Impressionism, *colour owes its brightness to force of contrast rather than to its inherent qualities.* Primary colours look brightest when they are brought into contrast with their *complementaries.* He posits that artists must more deeply observe colours in nature. In his paintings, he does not use those colours that we take for granted in a logical sense to describe the colours that we think we see. Instead, he uses an astoundingly rich array of different colours to intensify their contrasts, which in turns provides a more holistic presentation of what we actually perceive. In the above example, the sky is known logically as blue (the true), and it carries the meaning of hopefulness or blessedness (the good); shadows are known logically as black (the true), and they carry the meaning of horror or evil (the good). However, merely painting something with a tube of blue or black paint is in no way sufficient to represent the reality of the sky and shadows, not to mention the splendid content lying within or underneath those subjects. Therefore, a holistic presentation of the truth and goodness of an object or a thing involves the artist’s aesthetic engagement with such object or thing.

Social workers should possess the ability to see the full picture of a client’s situation by embracing as many contradictory elements as possible to arrive at a splendid depiction that holds the contents of truth and goodness as well. As in Impressionism, it is necessary to bring different complementaries together to present a contrasting portrayal of the picture that we see in the realities of our clients’ worlds. For instance, when working with an emotionally disturbed client, it is a social worker’s responsibility to
perceive a fuller picture of the client’s emotions (i.e., primary and secondary) before his/her condition can be understood more holistically. Primary emotions, which typically include fear, anger, sadness and happiness, are our first responses to situations. However, secondary emotions (i.e., the result of the conscious or unconscious value judgements we place on our primary emotions) complicate these situations. Replacing primary with secondary emotions typically makes it difficult for clients and others to make sense of what is actually occurring. By engaging aesthetically with clients, the social worker can apprehend a more comprehensive understanding of the client’s suffering by partaking of an array of various emotions. Such acts draw a picture that can represent the client’s situation not only truly but also aesthetically to protect social work from becoming dehumanized. However, aesthetic sensibility is not merely a technique to be learnt but an embodied sensual experience utilized by practitioners that must be cultivated through intersubjective encounters.

Social workers must have a comprehensive understanding of clients’ situations in light of the environmental contexts in which they live and act. Moreover, social workers must also be conscious of the fact that one cannot be “truly” neutral or objective. Therefore, aesthetic engagement in the practice of social work provides alternative lenses and perspectives for social workers to accompany clients in examining their dilemmas. With reference to his/her aesthetic experience, an experienced social worker can discern and appreciate the social beauty (Li & Cauvel, 2006) of an individual, a community, or a specific action or behaviour and can help the client take the right action in the right place at the right time. This aptitude and embodied practical sense involves social workers’ practice wisdom.
2.4.3. Aesthetics Experiences in Social Work

Aesthetic experience can be found in social work, although such kind of experience usually occurs when we are looking at a painting or listening to a song. It involves “a complex of heightened, emotional, cognitive, and sensory responses, in a personal, transformative process that may vary in intensity” (Siporin, 2009, p. 65). Other related concepts include the experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996), peak experience (Maslow, 1964), or euphoric moment. Siporin (2009) suggests that a beautiful and transcendental moment can be found in the artistry of social work practice:

“An aesthetic experience may be expressed by a client who, after a discussion with his social worker about his relationship with his mother, remarks: “I have been irrationally dependent and I now feel wonderfully free of my dependence on her approval.” An experience of “flow,” of acting at one’s “peak,” or in the “moment,” may be part of an aesthetic encounter. A deep, aesthetic experience may be an euphoric. “Eureka” event, or a profound emotional catharsis. It may be termed a state of wonder, rapture, exaltation, bliss, ecstasy, great joy or happiness. The awareness of this experience may bring transcendent, felt responses to the beauty, truth, and goodness of the art object” (p. 66).

All of these concepts describe a specific state of mind of an individual when he/she is coming across with something exceptionally beautiful. Yet, the “thing” that one is encountering, can be an artwork, a picturesque view of landscape, a person, or a random moment. One of the biggest contributions of Kant in aesthetics is that he defines
such an implicit apprehension of the beautiful and the sublime in a rather explicit way. The sensation of the beautiful is pleasant, joyous, and smiling. It brings about cheerfulness and simulates busy fervor. On the contrary, the sublime can be divided into terrifying sublime, noble sublime, and splendid sublime, which arouses enjoyment with wonder, shuddering, horror, dread, or melancholy. The sublime, unlike the beautiful, is awe-inspiring. It has a predominant position in aestheticism in Western art and philosophy. The beautiful produces pleasure, but the sublime inspires horror (a delightful horror) or a feeling of displeasure. In the Critique of Judgment, Kant covered the definition of aesthetic judgment in a great deal; however, has only provided a beginning effort to explain the relation of art to morality (Cohen, 1980). He did not explain the moral significance of aesthetics in rather a systematic way (Crowther, 1989). As we are unable to derive an objective definition of beauty, it is also ineffectual to spell out a set of straightforward criteria to define the beauty of social work. But at the same time, it is important for an experienced social worker to perceive the beauty in practice and connect that to morality.

To Kant, an art piece can be beautiful, but not great. “The beautiful is what pleases in the mere judging of it… The sublime is what pleases immediately through its resistance to the interest of the senses” (Kant, 1790/2007, p. 97). Similar to a great depth in the ocean or in outer space, a feeling of “deep loneliness” (Kant, 1763/2003, p. 48) is definitely sublime. Kant (1790/2007) uses examples such as “the fanciful desire for a retired country seat,” “the dream of the happiness of being able to spend one’s life with a little family on an island unknown to the rest of the world,” or “the misanthropy (most improperly so-called)” (p. 106), to articulate such a delightful loneliness. Kato et al.
(2012) conducted the first international study to explore the opinions of clinicians about the hikikomori syndrome in Japan and other countries. Hikikomori, a new syndrome of social withdrawal, refers to a complete withdrawal from society for more than six months. Kato et al. (2012) urges international collaboration in conducting further epidemiological and psychopathological studies in order to clarify “the nature of the syndrome and produce guidelines regarding the diagnosis and treatment” (p. 1073). In their study, treatment such as hospitalization in an open or locked ward is actively adopted internationally. Hidden elderly, who do not have normal social lives, social network, family, and community support, are considered pathological and pathetic by the same token. It is suggested that pharmacist and nursing interventions could help improve their qualities of life (Lee et al., 2013).

Unlike psychopathology, social work is not a profession that merely rescues clients from sadness and retrieves their beautiful minds. To engage with desolation, social workers, like miners, should excavate deeply into the internal frame of reference of clients. The needs of a client could be easily misread if the social worker lacks an aesthetic connection with the former. However, neither the author of this study nor Kant, pessimistically adopts a misanthropic stance to understand people in general, despite the fact that one might also find sublimity in sorrow (i.e. an interesting sadness, but not insipid and dispirited sadness). Kant (1790/2007) states clearly that “to be self-sufficing, and so not to stand in need of society, yet without being unsociable, i.e. without shunning it, is something approaching the sublime – a remark applicable to all superiority over needs” (p. 105).
There might be a desolate place in the heart of every individual. In search of the interesting sadness can be like a journey to find the “desolate place into which men might gladly withdraw themselves so as to hear no more of the world without, and be no longer versed in its affairs, a place, however, which must yet not be so altogether inhospitable as only to afford a most miserable retreat for a human being” (Kant, 1790/2007, p. 106). Mere pathological understanding of humanity might not be helpful and sometimes can even be harmful to social work practice. For some people, it gets better. Sadly though, for so many others, it only gets worse. Hence, the aesthetic reflexivity (Lash, 1993) should be upheld such that the embodied sensual experience of practitioners is recognized as one of the important ingredients in professional practice. One might call an object beautiful but not sublime, since the latter is not contained in any object in nature, but “only in our own mind” (Kant, 1790/2007, p. 94). The sublime plays a significant role in Kant's account of the connection between aesthetic judgment and morality.

2.4.4. Morality of Human Beings

Kant emphasizes “duty” in his moral theory that in virtue of being a rational agent, one act morally in accordance with reason. He coined “categorical imperative” as a central philosophical concept in his deontological moral philosophy. However, his assertion that one should only act in accordance with the moral law that is considered as a truth of reason has always been criticized as inhuman because he has omitted other things, such as empathy, emotion, or love that should also be able to motivate action. In a different vein, moral sentimentalists such as David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, or
Shaftesbury consider the morality of human beings is derived from a sense rather than an idea. They tend to reject reasoning as the source of moral distinctions because morality is to be felt but not to be judged of. Hume believes that morally acceptable actions are induced by feelings and his claim about morality has long been contrasted with Kant’s belief that we rely on reasons to decide what is morally acceptable.

Indeed, as Denis (2014) puts forth, Kant’s influence from sentimentalism can be seen clearly in his works on aesthetics (Kant, 1763/2003, 1790/2007) and there are important connections between the moral theories of Kant and Hume. The ethical philosophy of Kant is based on a love of contradiction (Froese, 2008). He approves the importance of moral feelings and highlights its connection with aesthetic judgment (Schaper, 1992). He allows aesthetic ideas to present a type of emotion that involves thought and reflection (Matherne, 2013). Callender (2005) supports that “[a]t the core of Kantian aesthetics is the seeming paradox that an aesthetic judgment is at the same time subjective and based on an emotional reaction, but also lays claim to universal assent” (p. 285). To Kant, Good-heartedness is beautiful. It belongs to “a sensitive ability of the heart to be moved with sympathy or benevolence” (Kant, 1763/2003, p. 63). A sanguine frame of mind accounts for a predominating feeling for the beautiful. One has the moral feeling when he/she amuses the others. However, Kant criticizes that such a moral feeling is without principles. It is beautiful but relies solely upon the impression of the particular moment. Therefore, he introduces the conception of sublime, for instance, in a melancholy frame of mind. In the words of Kant, affability is beautiful but truthfulness is sublime. One might call an object beautiful but not sublime, since the latter is not contained in any object in nature, but “only in our own mind” (Kant, 1790/2007, p. 94).
Loose (2012) argues that “moral ideas are the hidden source of the sublime” (p. 27). The sublime thus plays a significant role in Kant's account of the connection between aesthetic judgment and morality.

Aesthetic judgment refers to the interplay of the beautiful and the sublime. Unlike cognitive judgment that is based on conceptual application, aesthetic judgment is based primarily on feelings. Kant (1790/2007) posits that the beautiful is the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of the understanding, whereas the sublime exhibits an indeterminate concept of reason. With reference to Lyotard (1994), “sublime feeling is legitimate in demanding its universalization, without needing its own deduction. It owes this privilege to its close cousinship with moral feeling: free will is a universal idea, and respect, which is this idea felt subjectively, is also universal” (p. 229). The beautiful refers to a harmony between the imagination and the understanding, whereas the sublime implies a tension between the imagination and reason. He connects the beauty and sublime to moral culture. Aesthetics is more than the judgment of pure beauty that rests on a priori grounds. It should not be isolated from moral questions. Clewis (2009) concludes that sublimity encourages us to bring moral good into the world. It serves as a sign that the aesthetics in nature are aligned with our moral aims, moral lives, and moral principles. Siporin (2009) has provided an excellent example to describe the aesthetic experience in social work,

“In the social work helping process, an aesthetic experience may occur when a single mother and son have resolved their conflicts and have a session with their social worker, in which they express their love for each other, their awareness and enjoyment of their new affectionate relationship” (p. 65).
Aesthetic judgment of the beautiful and the sublime (especially for the sublime) are attributes of humanity. They rely on human sensitivity and can guide human conduct. Aesthetic experience serves as a propadeutic for morality, in that “the beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest; the sublime, to esteem it, even contrary to our (sensible) interest” (Kant, 1790/2007, §29). The Kantian aesthetics offer an invaluable channel for social work practitioners to get in touch with humanity and eventually get in touch with oneself. The judgment of taste is neither cognitive nor logical, but aesthetic. According to Lyotard (1994), “the sublime feeling is an emotion, a violent emotion, close to unreason, which forces thought to the extremes of pleasure and displeasure. From joyous exaltation to terror; the sublime feeling is as tightly strung between ultraviolet and infrared as respect is white” (p. 228).

For example, Kant elaborates the concept of sublimity in warfare. He appreciates the undaunted soldiers who know no fear and do not give way to danger. The more dangers they are exposed to, the more sublime they can exhibit. Rogers (2013) admonishes that social work is dangerous. “I think you should know that you can get killed doing this thing called social work. We work with marginalized and depressed people. The social worker is involved with the most dangerous animal on earth: The Human Being” (p. 17). In a similar vein, truthfulness can be threatening to both senders and receivers. It is the noblest device or weapon that one can utilize in human relationships. To embrace sublimity is about getting in touch with darkness but also truthfulness in humanity. According to Wicks (2007), the experience of sublimity underscores the primary, unconditional moral interests of Kant on moral awareness. Social work can be dangerous in a way that when we are excavating into the most
desolate place of our clients. We might fortunately discover or unfortunately trespass on the uninhabited and uninhibited paradises of our own. Without the fortitude of soldiers and the undaunted courage to know no fear, we shall continue to hide inside the bulwark of professionality.

2.4.5. Connecting Aesthetics with Morality

Kant (1790/2007) connects aesthetic judgment with moral feeling. Through aesthetic experiences, “we are given a sensible representation of the relation between reason and feeling in morality” (Schellekens, 2007, p. 103). As the universality of aesthetic judgement is grounded in the assumption of common sensibility, social workers should develop a distinct sensibility for understanding their service users’ unique worlds. A social worker’s practice wisdom refers to a distinct sensibility that is based upon his/her experience in seeing things beautifully. Practice wisdom in social work helps practitioners navigate beyond the true and the good. Our service users – and also most of us (i.e., social workers) – have encountered difficult choices in life. We are constantly faced with situations that cannot be easily resolved by referring to scientific evidence and moral principles. For instance, consider a mother who is told that her unborn foetus is diagnosed with Down's syndrome in early pregnancy. On one hand, her physician tells her that it is eminently sensible to terminate the pregnancy when a mother knows that her foetus has Down's syndrome; on the other hand, the religious leader of her church reminds her that abortion is a sin that is not acceptable. In this case, the mother is trapped in a dilemma in which the true and the good contradict one another, and she must make
the difficult decision whether to keep the baby or not given that there is no in-between answer.

As a highly experienced social worker with practice wisdom, one is able to feel the love of the mother and allow the mother to feel her own love to her child. Social worker might assist her in seeing the beauty or sublime of her actions that overrode the standard defined by the true or the good. Benevolence is beautiful, courage is sublime (Kant, 1790/2007). The mother can demonstrate the characteristics of both benevolence and courage whether she decides to keep the baby or not; for social beings, both raising a child with Down's syndrome and preventing its suffering by terminating pregnancy at an early stage are responsible actions that can be examined aesthetically rather than being analysed or adjudicated. For social work to be truly non-judgemental, the client must be given a relationship environment (Biestek, 1957) in which he/she can grow and determine solutions to problems. Nonetheless, remaining neutral or claiming to be objective is not always helpful for social workers in establishing working relationships with service users (Cheung, 2015). The mother does not need someone to remind her how unwise or how bad she is for keeping or not keeping the baby. Merely helping service users in looking for the true or the good might not necessarily be helpful to them when they simply must face the difficulties, complexities, and uncertainties of life.

Social work should move beyond the true and the good to help retrieve the humanistic focus in practice. As Kidder (2003) critically notes, ethical dilemmas refer not only to those difficult decisions between right and wrong but also – more importantly – to the tougher choices between right and right. Practice wisdom enables social workers to feel the love of the mother if she decides to keep the baby or to feel her pain (which is
also come from her love) if she chooses abortion. It is not important and even not appropriate should the social worker offer a best solution to her problem. However, it is crucial for a truly trustful relationship between the social worker and the mother to be developed before the latter can be empowered to escape from the never-ending dilemma. Hence, the universal assent of the aesthetic judgment allows emotions to be communicated among individuals and that can eventually foster empathic understanding and helping alliance. Social worker does not always need to take the lead, but can perform as an accompanist by working with the service user in playing a new piece of music together:

“The singer is the client, reading the music, but endeavouring to find a unique interpretation and expression. The social worker plays accompanist, supporting but not leading, adjusting volume and intensity so that it never obscures the singer’s voice” (Graybeal, 2014, p. 121).

2.4.6. The Relational Orientation in Social Work

For Kant and some of his followers, the aim of art is pleasure without any practical advantage (Tolstoy, 1898/1994). However, social work is, to a large extent, but somewhat mistakenly, being referred to as a “practical” profession. It involves helping individuals, families, and groups to overcome challenges in their lives by restoring or enhancing their capacity for social functioning. Therefore, it might bring about confusion and probably contradiction if the Kantian conception of aesthetics is to be implied to social work that art is regarded as an activity that yields pleasure only. In order to set
things right, social work has to be redefined precisely as a relationship-based activity rather than a “practical” profession at the very beginning. By adopting a relational orientation, the focus of social work intervention should be placed on the process of co-constructing a shared understanding from a two-person (i.e. worker and service user) instead of one-person treatment approach (Ornstein & Ganzer, 2005) through dialogue, exploration and mutual receptivity (Smith, 2001). Instead of being a technocrat with the expertise in tackling human problems by procedural knowledge, a social worker should be an empathic sharer in human suffering and a moral actor (Chu, Tsui, & Yan, 2009) who enables the service user to “achieve a realization of ordinary life in particular personal, social and cultural circumstances that entail real and messy choices between imperfect and mutually exclusive alternatives” (Clark, 2006).

By considering relationship as the change agent, the complex experiences and in-depth needs of the whole person can be understood by the practitioner in a holistic sense (Ornstein & Ganzer, 2005). Yet, a detached cognitive engagement cannot bring about deep and rich understanding of the others (Chu, Tsui, & Yan, 2009). As Clark (2006) puts forth, in a truthful engagement with the service user, claiming value neutral by the social worker is dishonest and practically impossible. Social workers should allow themselves to be reconstituted by the influence of their service users (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000) since the healing potential of an individual cannot be realized unless the deepest self of the practitioner comes across with the deepest self of the service user (Satir, 2000).

A beautiful piece of music can please us, disinterestedly, so as an attractive portrait of our service users’ here-and-now experiences. Here, we are not simply talking about how our service users actually look, or how happy or cheerful they are. Rather, this
is a kind of disinterested emotional happiness to be found in the relationship with our service users. We cannot be touched by a piece of music, a single line of words in a poem, or a painting, unless we are fully immersed in the moment when we are appreciating the artwork. Although the creator of that piece of art may not be physically present, an artwork does serve as a medium for the creator and recipient to relate and communicate with each other. In the same vein, we have to be fully immersed in the moment with our service users in order to be touched by them, and vice versa.

When two people come together by involving the other’s whole being without precondition, they are known as fully present to each other (Buber, 1965). A relational social worker (Tosone, 2004) should not perceive the service user as object. Instead, the two should be willing to be impacted and moved by each other by fully open and receptive to the experience of the moment (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). Such an artful way of intersubjective encounter is known as “presence” in the I–Thou relationship coined by Martin Buber. Buber (1970) acknowledges that human beings must relate to one another intersubjectively. His account of intersubjectivity famously involves mutual recognition and the dialogical encounter between I and Thou (Hudson, 2010). This view echoes the premise of the person-centred approach of Rogers that the therapist has a desire to meet the client as a person instead of having the thought that “I want to help the client” (Buber et al., 1997). In the I-Thou relationship, subjects perceive each other as unity of being and engage in a dialogue involving each other’s whole being. Geller and Greenberg (2002) insist that presence is a powerful healing component and an essential aspect of Rogers’ client-centered therapy. They see presence as the necessary foundation in person-centered approach that allows the relationship conditions to emerge. It is an
intense and rich experience of being fully in the moment with the client and a part of the healing process (Rogers, 1980).

The practitioner’s understanding of the service user’s experience can be enhanced by getting “as close as possible to the client’s experience while maintaining a sense of self as separate and whole” (Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 84). Only by this could a bonding that facilitate true dialogue and sharing can be developed. In the significant Buber-Roger dialogue in 1957 between the two leading proponents of the century, Buber challenged Rogers that there might be a power difference between the therapist and client in the counselling room. As Buber said,

“He [the client] cannot in the course of, eh let's say, a talk with you, he cannot change his position and eh, eh ask you, “Oh, Doctor, eh where have you been yesterday? [Rogers: Uh huh.] Eh, oh, have you been eh the movies? [Rogers: Uh huh] What was it and how were you impressed?” [Rogers: Uh huh] He cannot do it. [Rogers: Uh huh] So, eh, I, I see and feel very well your feeling, your attitude, your taking part. But you cannot change the given situation. There is something objectively real that confronts you. Not only he confronts you, the person, but just the situation. You cannot change it” (Buber et al., 1997, p. 41).

Rogers admits that the therapeutic relationship has structural limitations and is not fully mutual. Mutuality, which is different from equality, according to Buber, refers to something that two persons do together but neither of them can do it separately (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). However, Rogers defends that in the moment where real changes take place, it should be at a certain level of mutuality that the therapist does not only
understand the client as he/she is but also that the client senses the understanding and acceptance (Buber et al., 1997). Buber adds that “It is not the situation of an hour; it is a situation of minutes. And these minutes are made possible by you. Not at all by him” (Cissna & Anderson, 1994, p. 30). Such description of the moment of change fits the characteristics of practice wisdom that it is intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature. For being a relationship-based activity with the person-centred orientation, reciprocity is central to the artistry of helping relationship in social work (Buber, 1970; Kupfer, 1983).

The helping relationship in social work is a performance stage being set for an improvised scene (Graybeal, 2007) between social worker and service user. The relationship should not be considered as simply a means to some extrinsic end, but should be appreciated as an end-in-itself as an aesthetic object that reciprocity is esteemed as a constituting relation (Kupfer, 1983). Real changes happen when the social worker and service user experience mutuality, i.e., both of them experience the relationship as it seems to the other. As I have defined social work as a relationship-based activity with the person-centred orientation, I will now move on to elaborate Tolstoy’s ideas on art and justify social work activity as art.

2.4.7. From Kant to Tolstoy: The Use of a Social Worker’s Self

Kant’s definition of art has failed to satisfy Tolstoy. Besides Kant, he criticizes that a list of aestheticians, including Schiller, Fichte, and Schelling, etc., have provided no exact definition of art as their understanding of art is based primarily on the conception of beauty which pleases us. To Tolstoy, if we would like to know what art is,
we shall put aside the conception of beauty that confuses the whole matter. He disagrees with the metaphysicians that art is the manifestation of some mysterious ideas of beauty or God. As there is never an objective definition of beauty, he argues that the previous definitions of art that are founded on beauty and expounded by aesthetics “can in no sense serve as a basis for the definition of art; nor can a series of objects which afford us pleasure serve as the model of what art should be” (Tolstoy, 1898/1994, p. 53).

Rather than putting that Tolstoy has rejected Kant’s theory of art, it would be more appropriate to say that Tolstoy has enriched Kant’s idea regarding “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good” (Kant, 1790/2007, §59). Tolstoy suggests that the aesthetic judgement deals with the “form” of the work, whereas the moral deals with its “content” (Mounce, 2001). He concludes that aesthetic values are defined by moral values. He defines art in terms of its ability to communicate concepts of morality. According to Tolstoy (1898/1994), art is a form of communication, a means of union among men, and a spiritual organ of human life. It is infectious and the activity of art involves the “capacity of man to receive another man’s expression of feeling and to experience those feelings himself” (Tolstoy, 1898/1994, p. 57).

Tolstoy asserts that art is an important means of communication that feelings or experiences can be shared between each other. It fits the shoes of social work because service users are usually invited to share their feelings and experiences with their social workers. It is, with reference to Rogers (1986), empathic understanding. The use of empathy has long been emphasized in social work and psychotherapy. It has also been closely associated with therapeutic alliance. Practitioners generally believe that empathy can lead to a trustful worker-client relationship. With the help of empathy, it is assumed
that one can feel other’s feelings, see through other’s eyes, and enter into other’s state of mind (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). As a social worker or a therapist, one is usually convinced that it is of one’s professional duty to “know” what the others have gone wrong. It is assumed that one individual can be fully or partly known by another individual, provided that a trustful relationship has been established. However, to understand the others empathically is not entirely a cognitive process because feelings and experiences cannot be utterly described and explained by language. Phenomenologists are particularly interested to examine the role that intersubjective experience plays in the course of which we put ourselves into other’s shoes (Agosta, 1984; Jensen & Moran, 2012; Schertz, 2007; Zahavi, 2001). It is a kind of experience that has to be studied from the phenomenological attitude. Schertz (2007) calls for an ontological revision of empathy and contends that

“Empathy can be reinterpreted as a form of communication by which body consciousnesses interact in an intersubjective gestalt. It is no longer solely a cognitive ability, nor is it simply affective mirroring. Such limited views detract from the complex qualitative interaction that occurs between consciousnesses in the event of empathy” (p. 173).

For relationship-based social work activity being an art, a “common sense” that emotions can be communicated among individuals is required. Such a common sense, according to Kant, is a universal assent of the aesthetic judgment. It refers to a kind of “you-know-what-I-mean feeling” that has no objective referent in the physical world (Gilbert, 2006). The craftsmanship in social work is artistic rather than utilitarian-practical (Siporin, 2009) as social work being a profession that working with the interplay
between coherence and complexity of human experiences by practitioners’ intuitive knowledge (England, 1986). According to Dewey (1980), for “craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be ‘loving’; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised” (pp. 47-78). Therefore, the assumption that empathy can be “used” is problematic, in a twofold manner. First of all, as Levinas (1979) puts forth, “If one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other” (p. 83). In order to treat another person as a person, Levinas insists that one must refrain oneself from “treating the other person as an extension of my categories, my theories, my habitual or learned ways of perceiving others” (cited in Rossiter, 2011, p. 985). The otherness of the other can only manifest in the elusiveness and inaccessibility of that individual (Levinas, 1979). Hence, it is, to certain extent, nonsensical to claim that a person can possess exactly the same experience of other’s feelings or thoughts (Zahavi, 2001). Secondly, empathy should be spontaneous rather than intellectually mediated (Agosta, 1984).

In contrast to sympathy that is to feel for someone, empathy refers to the capacity to feel with someone (Kroll, 2010). However, it has always been considered, mistakenly, as an important phase before a relationship is established. Rogers (1951) advocates a person-centered intervention approach that leaves a clear-cut-therapist-client-relationship behind. He focuses on necessary therapeutic conditions that facilitate a climate for change, namely empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Knowledge, methods, skills and techniques of the therapist are not the determining factors of success in a person-centered therapeutic relationship. It is instead the way of being with the client along with the therapist-without-a-role formulation that defines the appropriate attitude of a person-centered practitioner (Rogers, 1980). As the service users
always know what is better for them, the critical role of a person-centered practitioner is to relate with clients’ here-and-now experiences and understand them empathically (Goldberg, 1999). Empathic understanding is a way of knowing the client through his or her own frame of reference and it serves the purpose of interpersonal communication on the perceptual field through a shared phenomenological experience. There is a common confusion that showing empathic and non-interpretive attitude by the helping professionals is a technique of the person-centered approach (Cheung, 2014). Murphy (2013) also criticizes that although practitioners such as social workers are usually claiming to be operating in a person-centered way, many of them are in fact using the relationship instrumentally.

Gray and Webb (2008) contend that “social work’s art lies not in the social worker as artist but rather in social work as the ‘work’ of art” (p. 182). Social work is an informed art that “prepares the practitioner for categories of concern, and the intuitive, improvisatory understanding that is expressed in the immeasurable details of being fully present to another human being” (Graybeal, 2007, p. 514). Social worker should not be regarded as a technocrat that is capable of “knowing” others by “the use of empathy.” Instead, the work of art in practice involves a great deal of “the use of self” since it requires distinct personal experiences and qualities of sensitivity, creativity, and imagination of practitioners (England, 1986; Siporin, 2009). Satir (2000) uses the metaphor of a musical instrument to relate the therapist’s use of the self. She points out that a competent player (i.e., a therapist) with a sensitive and well-trained ear can play well almost any music with a fine instrument. Yet, the music will certainly sound differently if it is played by different players.
“I think of the instrument as the self of the therapist: how complete one is as a person, how well one cares for oneself, how well one is tuned in to oneself, and how competent one is at one’s craft. I think of the music as the presentation of the patient. How that music is heard and understood by the therapist is a large factor in determining the outcome of the therapy” (Satir, 2000, p. 25).

In painting, the canvas is the medium that allows artists to convey messages and communicate feelings with audiences through their senses. In social work, the use of the practitioner’s self is the medium that allows service users to connect or reconnect with the inner part of their own selves. The use of self is highly emphasized in the artistry of social work practice (England, 1986). It is a prominent characteristic of social work that “calls for a commitment to a humanistic, ethical base of values in the conduct of one’s practice. This involves a moral attitude and ethical, caring, altruistic relationship to people and to their life situations” (Siporin, 2009, p. 25). Social workers serve as a canvas and permit the service users to draw pictures on them and look for interpretation. It is not of a social worker’s role to interpret the service users but instead serving as a medium for others to find one’s inner self. In that case, social work has to be relationship-based and the relationship ends in itself.

For example, in dealing with a depressed service user, the social worker might find him/herself showing certain depressive symptoms as well. Otherwise, such an understanding of others has never been empathic at all. We cannot claim that we understand others’ feeling merely by knowing instead of experiencing. After all, this kind of empathic understanding would connect us with morality. It provides us with an
opportunity to apprehend the socially unacceptable behaviours of others from a first-hand perspective. It also allows others to contemplate their own behaviours in a detached way.

“The experience is roughly comparable with that of hearing for the first time a recording of our own voice, which we have heard all our life, but from inside our own head. What emerges in the recording is our voice as others hear it. Thus through the experience of art we may learn both about others and about ourselves; in short, we may learn about life” (Mounce, 2004, p. 65).

Referring to Tolstoy, the work of art’s value is entirely determined by its moral character (Schellekens, 2007). For being a value-driven human service profession with distinctive moral character, social workers should maintain a truthful engagement with their service users in an authentic manner (Bisman, 2004; Clark, 2006). An experienced social worker with practice wisdom should possess this special attribute, i.e., a moral sensibility, in looking at service users’ struggle through an empathic insight (Siporin, 2009). In relationship-based social work, the work of art allows service users in looking at themselves through new lenses. Social workers and service users can undergo an aesthetic experience given that they are fully present to each other in the most vivid manner. For England (1986), “it is similar to the disinterested respect, the empathic acceptance that social worker’s prize in their professional attitudes to their clients” (p. 103). To this end, practice wisdom in social work is defined as an uncommon sense that enables the social worker to connect aesthetics and morality by the use of self.
2.5. Youth Work in Overseas and Local Context

2.5.1. Youth Work Defined

According to Sercombe (2010), youth work is a professional relationship that the primary client is the young person. It includes but not limited to the work of social workers. The key elements of youth work are voluntary involvement, association, informal relationship, and educational intention (Jeffs & Smith, 2010; Sercombe, 2010). It is very much contextual (Sapin, 2013) and full of ethical tensions and dilemmas (Banks, 1999, 2000). Both statutory and voluntary organizations work with young people by their specific ideas and methods of working strategies (Batten & Batten, 1970). For Goetschius, Tash, and Young Women's Christian Association (1967), the discussion in the field of youth work cannot be isolated from the larger society. It is not “a thing in itself”, but rather a kind of response to pressures, trends, ideas and attitudes of the outside world (p. 315). They have identified five stages of development in a relationship of with young people, namely (1) making contact, (2) testing out, (3) the expression of feeling, (4) the appearance of strong feelings, and (5) exploring the potential.

Jeffs and Smith (2010) suggest that youth workers should have faith in people rather than only being approachable and friendly. As for Sercombe (2010), “all the things that youth work claims to do and to be for young people are about the ethics of the situation” (p. 3). Anderson-Nathe (2010) further argues that youth workers might share power with clients and enable them to “set the tone for and direct the helping relationship” (p. 69). Indeed, the professionality of youth work lies in the relationship with clients instead of a set of practices (Sercombe, 2010). For a successful relationship to be
established, “the person or character of the worker is of fundamental importance” (Jeffs & Smith, 2010, p. 3). It is the central task of a youth worker to construct and sustain educational and social relationships with young people (Blacker, 2010).

2.5.2. Youth Work: A Showcase of Relationship-Based Social Work

Ruch (2010) emphasizes the emotionally charged nature of social work encounters and upholds the importance of relationship in practice. The “use” of relationship is more of an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Social work practitioners should develop “a way of understanding how a thoughtful and emotionally receptive stance to clients can have therapeutic value without anything fancy being done (Bower, 2005, p. 12). Yet, the most challenging part of this value-based profession is that social work professionals have to be perceived as trustworthy by those with whom we work (Healy, 2015). In many of the service settings, trustworthiness is not considered as important as confidence in light of the service nature. Social worker is no longer to be trusted as a unique individual, but rather, to be relied on as a technocrat in resolving client’s problem efficiently.

Youth work, however, preserves the essence of practicing in a relationship-based manner. To Young (2006), youth work is not only a form of practice that is based on voluntary relationship with young people “involving honesty, trust, respect and reciprocity” (p. 5), but also “an exercise in moral philosophy insofar as it enables and supports young people to examine what they consider to be ‘good or bad’, ‘right or wrong’, ‘desirable or undesirable’ in relation to self and others” (p. 3). Social workers are
required to master the art of relating with the young people from a non-directive (Batten & Batten, 1970) stance. Therefore, the art of youth work refers to the ability of youth worker in making and sustaining such relationships with young people that enables and supports them to develop themselves as authentic human beings (Young, 2006). Nevertheless, there is still lack of solid evidence to support the importance of the relationship as a vehicle for change in social work (Turney, 2010). I suggested that youth work setting could serve as a desirable platform to demonstrate how a “good relationship” can be established between social workers and service users. Especially in confronting the ambiguous, complex, and uncertain nature of practice environment in youth work, the use of practice wisdom is of utmost importance in building a genuine, constructive, and empowering relationship. Nonetheless, to the best knowledge of the author, there was limited local literature to study the nature of youth work as a relationship-based social work practice in Hong Kong. The findings of this study provided soft evidences (Murdach, 2010) that aimed to “re-empower” youth workers by drawing a clearer picture of what a youth worker exactly does and reclaiming the professionality of social work in these service settings.

2.5.3. Social Work Services for Young People in Hong Kong

The development of personal social work among young people in Hong Kong can be traced back to the late 1960s. It was primarily a response to the large-scale leftist riots in 1967. This riot lasted for seven months, with more than fifty people had been killed, and almost five thousand people were arrested. The overall objective of personal social
work among young people at that time was “to reduce or prevent anti-social or delinquent behaviour in young people” (Hong Kong Social Welfare Department, 1977, p. 2). Social work services were deemed necessary for identifying young people at risk and integrating them into normal social group activities. Yet, it has already been almost a half-decade after the riot. Such a stigmatized and out-of-date understanding of youth work has to be discarded. At the time of conducting this study, there were a total of 138 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs), 23 Children and Youth Services Centres (CYCs), 19 Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams (YOTs), 18 Outreaching Teams for Young Night Drifters (YNDs), and 34 Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide stationing social work service at 465 secondary schools in Hong Kong. More than 2,000 registered social workers were funded by the Social Welfare Department in providing “generic” social work services for young people, not to mention services that were funded for specific purposes and other non-subvented youth services.

2.5.4. Critical Issues Regarding Youth Work Practice in Hong Kong

Youth work practice in Hong Kong is in crisis. Practitioners and service administrators are facing a market-driven environment that promotes competitive bidding on government subventions and the development of quasi-welfare markets. Over the last decade, service units have been funded by the Social Welfare Department through the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS). It has been one of the predominant models of public funding and financial control of NGOs in Hong Kong (Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee, 2008). Although the introduction of the LSGSS
aims to provide NGOs with the autonomy and flexibility to deploy resources and reengineer their services, the LSGSS has in fact received more complaints than compliments. Social work services have been largely commodified. There is an emerging role of social work services as a product. Particularly in youth work services, social work activities have already become products that can be easily reproduced and sold to other customers (for instance, primary or secondary schools). School principals and non-social-work managerial staff “are given authority to shop for these services on the market as customers” (Cheung, 2016, p. 8). Service administrators serve as salespersons in promoting their products to these customers. It is even assumed that “a program that works for one school might also fit another, and as a result, individual students’ needs are not considered to be a high priority” (Cheung, 2016, p. 8). Hence, social work services are somehow managed by social work managers and operated by frontline practitioners as a kind of social work business (Harris, 2003). In youth work,

“For the sake of generating surplus, producing standardized social work programs in schools is the most common tactic used by agencies to survive on the battlefield. Social workers are expected to administer intensified program sessions to as many students as they can within the shortest period of time. Similar programs can also be reproduced and sold to other schools to save extra effort. Neither the uniqueness of any single practitioner nor the need of any specific client is fully considered...

Frontline practitioners are now more reluctant to become involved in typical social work interventions which are obviously less cost-effective, such as outreaching social work, casework counseling, and social work groups. Social worker
managers who support this climate change will continue to expand their business along this de-professionalized trend” (Cheung, 2016, pp. 9-10).

As Rogowski (2012) notes, such an ideological shift from social democracy to neoliberalism that eventually promotes a laissez-faire policy and non-interventionism has resulted in the de-professionalization of social work. Especially for the case of youth work in Hong Kong, the commodification of welfare has resulted in contradictions between commercial and social work values and hindered the possibilities for progressive, radical, and critical practice (Cheung, 2016).

2.6. Summary

Over the century, the purpose of social work has been evolving. Social work has been regarded as an art since the early 20th century. Social work pioneers, such as Mary Ellen Richmond, Mary Cromwell Jarrett, and Frank Dekker Watson support that social work is the art of working with an individual who is in need of a better relation with other people and the society. The artistry of social work practice refers to “helping people to resolve problems in living calls for a restructuring of relationship patterns between people and their environment, so that they are complementary in goodness of fit and in their reciprocal well-functioning” (Siporin, 2009, p. 16). As time goes by, academics and practitioners have increasingly abandoned this understanding of social work.

Social work, as a profession that is grounded in the demonstrated positive outcomes discovered through research or rigorous evaluation, should be evidence-informed.
However, regarding clients as merely a mixture of various controllable factors would be insufficient for a comprehensive and humanistic understanding (Chu, Tsui & Yan 2009). Even in a well-developed profession – medicine, there is a growing concern for studying the effects of physicians’ emotional responses (Ofri, 2013). According to Taylor and White (2006), who embrace uncertainty in humanistic professions, a detached and rational approach “would be sufficient if doctoring required only technical skill or craft knowledge. But it is argued, there is much more to professional practice than that” (p. 947). In his book chapter “Doctoring: Science or Art?,” Felch (1996) also suggests that “the pendulum today is much too far at the Medicine-as-Science extreme” (p. 141). Although there is an abundance of parallel concepts, namely felt-sense (Gendlin, 1973), somatic or embodied empathy (Cooper, 2001), and bodily knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986; Sacks, 1985), etc., people are taught not to trust their embodied wisdom (Saleebey, 1989). Indeed, professional practitioners recognize their bodies as the sources of knowledge. Recent research on bodily sensations of social workers (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012) reveals that they are comprised of somatic (physical) and affective (feelings) responses. Similar studies were conducted for medical doctors (Ofri, 2013) and psychotherapists (Finlay, 2013; Shaw, 2004). In the arena such as medical care that relies heavily on technical-rationalism, Ofri (2013) reports that considering doctors as emotionless is basically an erroneous stereotype. Emotion plays a dominant role in medical decision-making, quality-control, and clinical algorithms, with or without one’s conscious awareness. Practice wisdom addresses how practitioners make use of their bodies, personal presence and relational perceptiveness to determine their actions and responses in practice. As such, wise practice of an effective practitioner can be regarded
as “a function and emergent process of a vividly bodily subject and a dynamic, social and systemic embodiment of realities” (Longhofer & Floersch, 2012, p. 25), in an embodied co-entanglement.

Social work should also be value-based and person-centered. It is a kind of practice that ethics precedes professional knowledge (Rossiter, 2011). In response to the critique of Flexner (1915) that there is a need to develop a scientific body of knowledge of social work, there has long been a counteracting force to emphasize the moral base of the profession. With the increasing concern of promoting the professional status of social work, social workers have been encouraged to practice ethically, however, as a kind of managerial ethics. It is at the most basic level of getting rid of ethical complaints against practitioners and protecting the agency from legal risk related to professional misconduct. It is in fact a matter of control that to ensure the service is overseen effectively and operated within the agreed policies (Coulshed et al., 2006). The emphasis of neutrality and objectivity is seen as part of the professional obligation. Yet, it has come to academics’ attention that the promotion of value-free intervention is not helpful for dealing with the moral conundrum of practice. Social work is not value-free because social work is no longer social work anymore without values and mission (Bisman, 2004; Chu et al., 2009). There is a common confusion in considering the moral world as a world of truths rather than a world of ideals. Hence, social work must take pride in its moral core and respond to the moral imperative of caring in practice. Unlike the relationship between the priest or minister and the members of his church that is clearly imbued with moral purpose, social workers are not making straightforward moral judgments for their service users (Clark, 2006). Social work has to be distinguished from
other professional practice since it is person-centered (Rogers, 1986) and characterized by putting humanistic values into practice (Chu et al., 2009). It has to be virtue-based that the moral identity of a virtuous social worker is dispositional rather than functional (McBeath & Webb, 2002).

Although Biestek (1957) highlights the importance of showing acceptance, being non-judgmental, and allowing client's self-determination in casework relationship, claiming value neutrality and maintaining a degree of interpersonal distance from the service users are not helpful for developing a truthful engagement (Clark, 2006). Social work is a two-way process (Yan, 2005) that allows personal values and moral character of both parties (i.e., social worker and service user) to interact in a humanistic manner with each other. Social workers serve as moral actors (Chu et al., 2009), bearers of context-sensitive moral values (Clark, 2006), and moral agents who possess an inner moral sense (McBeath & Webb, 2002). A framework of “strong thesis of value involvement” is developed by Yuen (2010) to emphasize the importance of value involvement in social work. He contends that that social work is itself a moral practice and social workers should not adopt a value-detached attitude. In sum, the primary purpose of social work is about relating with and trying to understand people (Howe, 1998), by expanding one’s self to other and fulfilling the aesthetic aspects of each other’s soul (Siporin, 2009).

Practice wisdom in social work “is constituted intersubjectively and grounded in personal contexts” (Chu & Tsui, 2008, p. 53). For a trustful relationship to be developed and mutual understanding to be constructed, a social worker should relate with his/her service user as a fellow traveler, rather than a technical-rational expert, along the
uncertain process of engagement. Professional practice should necessarily be evidence-informed, but evidence should not be limited to hard data. As there is a tendency for enthusiastic researchers and reluctant practitioners to set up a dichotomy between objective, scientific data and intuitive understanding gained through practice wisdom, there is a need to develop a different perspective on this problem, “a perspective which would not disparage either the kind of knowledge often meant by practice wisdom or that which can be known through empirical techniques” (Imre, 1985, p. 137). For social work being an empirically grounded profession, the soft evidence of such a humanistic practice and its invaluable practice wisdom have to be taken into account.
CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Bridging the Knowledge Gap between Theory and Practice

3.1.1. The Theory Gap of Practice Wisdom in Social Work

Boehm (1958) concludes that tested knowledge, hypothetical knowledge, and practice wisdom are the core ingredients of the scientific base of social work. He assumes that social work is “an art with a scientific and value foundation” (p. 10) and that with practice wisdom and other types of knowledge, social work can fulfil the functions of restoration, provision of resources, and prevention to meet basic human needs in the social realm. Boehm (1958) follows the agenda of Flexner (1915) in promoting the establishment of a scientific basis for professions such as medicine, nursing, and social work (Powell, 2003). Despite the efforts of numerous international scholars to define practice wisdom after Boehm (1958), the articulation of such common sense (Barker, 1999; England, 1986; Powell, 2008) in social work has not been as clear as desired. The discussion of practice wisdom has been focused too heavily on how social work can be practiced effectively and efficiently among practitioners.

In order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of our service users, England (1986) put forward the use of intuition and common sense in social work. Moreover, the work of Schön (1983) that emphasizes reflecting-in-action sheds light on the artistry of social work practice (Gray & Schubert, 2013), describing how social workers can discern, respond, and reflect simultaneously without having pre-existing
solutions. Social work is thus compared with artistic performance such as musical improvisation in that practitioners are able to act, reflect and make necessary changes simultaneously.

This study does not intend to draw a typical and ordinary conclusion that practice wisdom in social work includes a rich combination of tacit knowing, intuitive actions, values, experiences, practice knowledge, etc. For example, in “The Social Work Dictionary” (Barker, 1999), practice wisdom is defined as “the accumulation of information, assumptions, ideologies, and judgements that have seemed practically useful in fulfilling the expectations of the job” (p. 370), or, as Dybicz (2004) concludes, it denotes “competency in the application of social work values and guidelines to the helping process in which the social worker and client engage” (p. 202). I have found these definitions inadequate for grasping the true essence of practice wisdom in social work. Social workers should possess an “uncommonly good common sense” (England, 1986, p. 33) by knowing something morally (Whan, 1986) through the embodied reasoning process of experienced practitioners; however, the study of such an “uncommon sense” is rather uncommon in social work research.

3.1.2. The Practice Gap of Practice Wisdom in Social Work

After the introduction of positivist paradigm that embraces empirical evidences and logical analysis, there has been a therapeutic trend (Long, 2011) that seeks to identify a new means of safeguarding the professional prestige of social work. In order to answer the question “how does ‘social work’ work?” (Leslie & Cassano, 2003; Sheppard, 1998)
by stakeholders, funders, clients, and the general public, more emphasis has been put on the use of hard, quantifiable, and scientific data in contemporary evidence-based social work activity. This study was conducted at a time when social work was still challenged as a legitimate profession in ways that were similar to those expressed a century earlier by Flexner (1915). As a social work practitioner (particularly in youth work), I share the dilemma faced by fellow colleagues that there is a need to justify the implicit process before any explicit actions we made, but the process is indeed a tacit, rapid, intuitive, and embodied one, and cannot be easily articulated. As a doctoral candidate, I also share the dilemma faced by academics that the boundaries (Abbott, 1995) of social work have long been unclear, and it is uneasy to withstand the post-positivistic trend in looking for scientific evidence in social work practice. For better or worse, social work has been identified as a profession that the job is “to mediate between all the others” (Abbot, 1995, p. 549). Despite social work is considered as a profession, it is based rather upon a functionalist conception that social work professionals are good at connecting other professional forces together, or only capable of doing part of what other professionals can do.

Although Tyson (1994) defends the value of practice wisdom and argues that one cannot equate it with practitioner knowledge so as to imply it is inherently less scientific, by adopting the standard of science to safeguard the reputation of such an artistic sense in social work practice has not been much helpful in resolving the fundamental estrangement between science and the artistry of practice. Yet, the meaning of practice wisdom is never as simple as it sounds (Powell, 2008). Therefore, using the terms such as competency, good practice, application, and guidelines, etc. to help define practice
wisdom has largely downplayed its eminence and eventually driven the discussion towards a way that “the unseen character of social work” (England, 1986, p. 20) cannot be comprehensively revealed. By referring to social work activity as art (England, 1986; Goldstein, 1990, 1992; Gray & Schubert, 2010; Gray & Webb, 2008) at the outset, I do not perceive practice wisdom from a functionalist angle as some of the contemporary scholars do. I do not define or redefine practice wisdom as a competency in technical terms or merely a combination of attributes, but instead articulates how practice wisdom can be cultivated to become manifest through the unique intersubjective encounters between human beings in social work relationships. Hence, the connection of practice wisdom with art, aesthetics, and morality has to be examined.

3.2. The Constitution of Relationship-based Social Work

I posited that the distinctiveness and professionality of social work lie in the relationship between social workers and service users. Practice wisdom in social work, refers to the humanistic attitude and embodied practical sense that can only be cultivated by engaging with service users in an unconditional and person-centred relationships. As Howe (1994) notes, “social work’s essential character formed under modernity’s identification of universal standards of truth, goodness and beauty applied to the self and society” (p. 530). He relates the concepts of care, cure, and control to the beautiful, the true, and the good, respectively, in the formation of social work. He adds that, “if beauty and satisfying form are the outward expression of an object's inner state, then it behoves social workers to recognize the principles upon which beauty is based so that they can
ensure that clients’ lives can be lived aesthetically as well as justly and effectively” (Howe, 1994, p. 518).

![Diagram 1: The constitution of relationship-based social work](image)

I defined practice wisdom as an uncommon sense that enables the social worker to connect aesthetics and morality by the use of self. As can be seen in the above conceptual map, I am convinced that the beauty of social work represent truth and goodness at the same time. Practice wisdom refers to the valuable possession of an experienced practitioner who is particularly good at using his/her own self, and serves as a virtuous moral actor in relationship-based social work practice. My understanding on practice wisdom is based on the following assumptions:

1. Social work is a two-way process (Yan, 2005).
2. Social work is no longer social work anymore without values and mission (Bisman, 2004).
3. Social worker possesses a moral identity (Clark, 2006; Mcbeath & Webb, 2002).

4. The primary purpose of social work is about relating with and trying to understand people (Howe, 1998).

5. Practice wisdom is social work is constituted intersubjectively and grounded in personal contexts (Chu & Tsui, 2008).

Practice wisdom is spontaneous and cannot be explained easily. Therefore, as a practitioner and a doctoral candidate, I have the responsibility to define it more clearly. This study aimed to reclaim the professionality of social work in terms of its ability in establishing a solid and change-inducing relationship with service users. Besides, practice wisdom refers to a practical common sense and a virtue that embodied in experienced practitioners. In that case, I decided to invite senior practitioners who have 10-30 years of experience in the field to serve as informants of this study. More importantly, practice wisdom has to be cultivated through the relationship between social workers and service users. It is therefore appropriate to choose “relationship” as an entry point to study the issue of practice wisdom. However, I think these above-mentioned components are not enough to explain the definition of “practice wisdom”. In the following section, I tried to connect the Chinese interpretations of wisdom and theories of art and aesthetics to this sophisticated concept.
3.3. The Conceptual Framework of this Study

In Chinese, wisdom is translated as zhi hui. Wisdom combines two Chinese characters, namely, zhi and hui, known as the external and internal attributes of human beings, respectively. This study presented a conceptual framework to suggest that practicing social work in itself can be a self-transcendental process. By connecting external attributes such as social work knowledge, skills, theories, and experience with internal attributes such as emotions, benevolence, moral feelings, and values, social workers can draw near to their authentic selves. The course of approaching one’s authentic self is the manifestation of zhi hui (wisdom), in particular. Practice wisdom in social work referred to how the self-actualized social workers can approach to the flow and peak experiences by applying situational recollection, holistic recognition, intuitive decision, and absorbed awareness (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986) in any unfamiliar situations. As a bridge between knowledge and the heart, social workers were able to acquire comprehensive visions of themselves at first before offering beautiful solutions to others (i.e., their clients) to approach ideal and united visions of what is good and also true in the larger society (Li & Cauvel, 2006). A service user’s aesthetic transformative
process is self-transcendental and requires the client to experience “the process of change at a gut level, wherein his or her heart, mind, body, and soul are fully engaged in the change process” (Siporin, 1988, p. 183). With practice wisdom, changes can be induced by connecting clients through the distinctive form of the human-to-human relationships in social work.

![Diagram 3: Practice wisdom in social work: A bridge between knowledge and the heart](image)

The premises of this conceptual framework are fourfold. First, the soft knowledge involved in social work practice is tacit, intuitive, and embodied. Practice wisdom is not some type of codifiable professional knowledge and is also not merely practice experiences. Rather, it is value-driven, context-specific, and highly personalized understanding of the social environment. Second, grounded in the Chinese’s understanding on the external and internal attributes of wisdom (*zhi hui*), social workers are believed that they can approach their authentic selves through a transcendental journey of cultivating practice wisdom. Subsequently, clients’ internal sources of healing strength can be induced by self-actualized social workers. Third, the worker-client alliance is at the heart of humanistic social work practice; it stipulates that real changes
cannot be made without successful engagement in the intersubjective encounter between I and Thou (i.e., worker and client). Last (but not least), by applying Li’s refinement of Kant’s philosophy of aesthetics, social workers can acquire the practice wisdom to apprehend the social beauty in the client-environment context. All in all, it is never a comfortable task, as Tosone (2013) notes, to be a truly relational social worker in an evidence-based world.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Question

Youth work setting was adopted as a showcase of relationship-based social work practice in this study. It was an invaluable resource for examining the tacit, spontaneous, and embodied practice wisdom of social workers. As the working scenario of youth work setting is highly uncertain, I was interested in exploring how senior practitioners are able to cope with challenges in the course of establishing social work relationship by their practice wisdom. This study was concerned with the following major and corollary research questions.

4.1.1. Major Questions

1. What is practice wisdom in the artistry of social work practice?

4.1.2. Corollary Questions

1. What is the role of social workers in the relationship with young people?

2. How does practice wisdom manifest in the relationship between social worker and service users?
3. What are the important ingredients in a voluntary and trustful social work relationship between social workers and service users?

4. To what extent practice wisdom in social work relationship is or is not skills?

4.2. Research Design

The present study aimed to examine practice wisdom in the social work relationship between social workers and service users. As Prus (1996, pp. 18-19) reminds, in the study of human lived experience, qualitative researchers should attend to:

(1) the intersubjective nature of human behaviour;
(2) the viewpoints of those whose worlds they purport to examine;
(3) the interpretations or meanings that people attach to themselves, other people, and other objects of their experiences;
(4) the ways in which people do things on both a solitary and interactive basis;
(5) the attempts that people make to influence others;
(6) the bonds that people develop with others over time and the ways in which they attend to these relationships; and
(7) the processes, natural histories or sequences of encounters, exchanges, and events that people develop and experience over time.

A qualitative approach with heuristic direction was chosen. Research procedures with heuristic direction were dialectical. Open questions were preferred. The text gathered from detailed descriptions, direct quotations, and case documentations was interrogated from as many different perspectives as possible. The researcher obtained
qualitative depictions that were at the heart and depths of a person's experience - depictions of situations, events, conversations, relationships, feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs (Moustakas, 1990). Kleining and Witt (2000) identify four basic rules for heuristic researcher to optimize the chance for discovery. They are as follows:

1. The research person should be open to new concepts and change his/her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them;
2. The topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process;
3. Data should be collected under the paradigm of maximum structural variation of perspectives; and
4. The analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities.

This study explored how a voluntary and trustful relationship can be cultivated between social workers and young people. Personal perceptions and particular stories of the informants, which include individual and social construction of experiences, together with the connection between theory, data and experiences, were gathered as a form of knowledge through in-depth interviews. Key and Kerr (2011) have integrated four vital and interconnected elements in applying a heuristic method, namely intersubjective enquiry between researchers, ecological contextualization, social activism, and engagement with the unconscious. Research subjects in this study were considered co-researchers (Tyson, 1995). It was the intersubjective process between research and the co-researchers to provide support and generate a creative tension (Key and Kerr, 2011). Grounded upon the heuristic paradigm in social work research, this study addressed the
importance of looking for practice wisdom of practitioners by acknowledging their role as co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990, 1994) rather than as research subjects only.

4.3. Heuristic Research Methodology: A Brief Recapitulation

The etymology of heuristic is in the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or find. The heuristic inquiry begins with the self-searching process of a specific topic by the researcher. By having a very intense interest and desire to uncover the puzzling phenomenon, the researcher actively engages with the topic by making use of self-inquiries and self-dialogues at the early stage. It follows by the process of immersion which the researcher literally lives with the research theme or question intimately in “walking, sleeping, and even dream state” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). For the researcher, everything that he/she encounters in daily life can help inspire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Such a sense of total involvement ignites the “search from the internal frame of reference” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 47) and pays a lot of attention to personal knowledge, hunches, intuitive clues, and tacit knowing. After that, sufficient time has to be allowed for incubation and illumination to occur naturally. During incubation, the researcher retreats from the research question and wait for further clarifications by the inner working of his/her mind. A new dimension of knowledge may be formed after the awakening breakthrough from tacit knowing to conscious awareness, i.e. illumination. The characteristics of heuristic research questions are as follows (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43):
1. It seeks to reveal more fully the essence or meaning of a phenomenon of human experience.
2. It seeks to discover the qualitative aspects, rather than quantitative dimensions, of the phenomenon.
3. It engages one’s total self and evokes a personal and passionate involvement and active participation in the process.
4. It does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships.
5. It is illuminated through careful descriptions, illustrations, metaphors, poetry, dialogue, and other creative renderings rather than by measurements, ratings or scores.

4.4. A Heuristic Inquiry of Practice Wisdom in Social Work

The heuristic paradigm facilitates a fruitful fusion of practice and research. Heineman-Pieper, Tyson and Pieper (2002) note that the heuristic paradigm has always been misunderstood and misinterpreted by social work scholars. They identify three commonly-adopted research paradigms, namely logical empiricism, relativism, and heuristics, and suggested that the heuristic paradigm (although often being confused with relativism) fits well with social work research. Unlike relativists who explain theories by reference to social contextual influences, and are skeptical about science, the heuristic paradigm does have such a destructive impact on social work since it is regarded as “the only paradigm for social work research that is grounded in coherent conceptual and scientific foundations, and that is consistent with social work’s humanistic values and ideals” (Tyson & Pieper, 2002, p. 22). Although this assertion is still debatable, I contend
that the heuristic paradigm serves as a suitable channel for researchers in getting closer to
the unexplored enigma of practice wisdom, i.e. the practitioners’ intuition in social work.

As a meta-theory of research, the heuristic paradigm starts from the realization
that no privileged realities are present. It strongly highlights the internal frame of
reference, intuition, and indwelling of the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). Researchers
must accept that it is impossible to include everything in a heuristic inquiry. Biases are
common and are not to be avoided but to be mastered. Heuristic researchers are not
opposed to experimental or interventionist methods. It has been a misunderstanding that
they consider only qualitative approaches. Instead, they accept different types of rigorous
tools for data collection and analysis (Tyson, 1992). The research design should not be
determined by the research paradigm, but should be decided by the individual researcher
according to their particular research question within a specific context (Heineman-Pieper,
Tyson and Pieper, 2002). More importantly, the heuristic paradigm “addresses the
assumptions entailed in how one generates and appraises knowledge” (Tyson, 1992, p.
549). Through the collection and examination of “narrative descriptions, dialogues,
tories, poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal
documents”, a heuristic researcher seeks to explore the “full and complete depictions of
the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person” (Moustakas, 1990,
p. 39).

The word “heuristic” by itself also refers to the act of knowing in spontaneous
decision-making (Tyson, 1992). The heuristic paradigm is introduced to social science by
the Nobel Prize winner Herbert Simon. Based upon the work of Simon (1955, 1956, 1990)
on decision-making and problem-solving, Klein (2004) contends that gathering and
analyzing all the facts before making any important decision is rather impossible. It echoes the assertion of practice wisdom that social work decisions are not being made after a series of careful calculations. As DeRoos (1990) concluded, the works of Herbert Simon on bounded rationality, evolutionary epistemology of Donald T. Campbell, and Donald Schôn’s reflective practice are combined together to give meanings in social work practice wisdom. It explains how practice wisdom is built upon practice and life experiences. Influenced heavily by Polanyi (1966), the heuristic paradigm embraces the concepts of tacit knowing, intuition, and indwelling (Moustakas, 1990). There is a need for social work practitioners to be explicit about their reasoning process in order to justify the presence of “unreliable, personal, idiosyncratic knowledge built up through practice experience” (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 222). Chu and Tsui (2008) echo with Polkinghorne’s (2004) assertion that social work is a “judgment-based practice” rather than a “technical rational practice” and emphasize the importance of understanding practice wisdom through exploring the embodied reasoning process of practitioners. These assertions are aligned with the understanding of practice wisdom by Longhofer and Floersch (2012) that “address how in practice we use our bodies, our personal presence, and our clients in contingent situations” (p.511). Heineman (1981) introduced the heuristic paradigm to social work research. This paradigm allows research to serve as a tool for practitioners and practice educators in order to understand “the complex, changing, and diverse realities that social workers face” (Tyson, 1992, p. 542). The self of the researcher is acknowledged throughout a process that incorporates creative self-processes and self-discoveries (Moustakas, 1990). The application of a heuristic to a problem yields a transformation of the problem into an intuitively related problem. As a social worker, one
would understand the phenomenon with increasing depth, so as to experience growing self-awareness and self-knowledge through the practice of heuristic research.

In spite of its significance to human services, empirical research on practice wisdom is exceptionally rare in social work. Social workers are regarded as reflective experts who make professional decisions by heuristic and intuitive actions instead of following-the-rules behaviour as stressed by evidence-based practice. Hence, Guo and Tsui (2014) argue that reflective practice should be preferable to evidence-based practice because social work interventions are usually uncertain and the process of decision-making in the real world is, in fact, context-dependent. Methodological challenge is one of the major obstacles in looking for the soft evidence (Murdach, 2010) of practitioners’ wisdom and experiences. Heuristic discovery, which emphasizes “the power of revelation in tacit knowing” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20) will guide us through this journey in the dark. Throughout the six important phases in heuristic research—namely initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis—Key and Kerr (2011) stress the importance of engaging with our unconscious as reflective heuristic researchers and looking carefully into the pros and cons as we are intensely engaging with the research. A recent study on practitioners’ knowledge (Tyson-McCrea and Bulanda, 2010), which focuses primarily on the social workers’ subjective experience of their own knowledge and clinical decisions, sheds light on how a heuristic inquiry could help narrow down the gap between theory and real-life practice.
4.5. Sampling

The informants for this study consisted of 10 senior social workers in the youth work settings. Local practitioners with more than 10 years of experiences are generally regarded as “senior” in the field. It echoes with the laboratory analyses of expert performance by Ericsson and Lehmann (1996) in various domains such as chess, medicine, bridge, sports, dance, and music, etc. that “the highest levels of human performance in different domains can only be attained after around ten years of extended, daily amounts of deliberate practice activities” (p. 273). The laboratory study also finds out that the age at which experts typically reach their peak performance is in the third and fourth decades for the arts and sciences. Therefore, senior practitioners with 10-30 years of experiences were invited as informants in this study.

The informants ranged in different ages, gender, service settings and years of experiences. Data collection was by interview of individual or group. It was directly tied to analysis that eventually was coded or structured into themes. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to gain insight from individual evaluations of his/her “practice wisdom.”
4.6. Characteristics of Informants

Ten youth workers were invited to participate in this study. Six of them are female and four are male. All of them had more than ten years of experiences in youth work. The most experienced informant had 27 years of experience and was specialized in working with disengaged young people. Purposive sampling was adopted in this study. The goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of research informants that are of interest to the researcher and will be best to answer the research question. This group of informants was selected because they were coming from different service settings in local youth work. Five of them were employed in the Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres (ICYSCs). Two were school social workers. One of them was

Diagram 4. Illustration of the gradual increases in expert performance

(Ericsson and Lehmann, 1996)
working in a District Youth Outreaching Social Work Team (YOT). The remaining two was employed by youth services that were targeted at serving disengaged young people. Seven of the informants were serving in frontline position, two were unit-in-charge or service-in-charge, and one was service supervisor. Their education background ranged from diploma, undergraduate to postgraduate level. All of them worked in social service agencies that have more than one service unit.

Snowball sampling was also applied in this study because the researcher assumed that practice wisdom was not a general possession of every youth worker, even though for experienced practitioner. On the other hand, informants were not regarded as research subjects but co-researchers in heuristic research (Key & Kerr, 2011; Moustakas, 1990, 1994; Tyson, 1995). Therefore, existing informants, who were considered possessing practice wisdom, were invited to give advice to the researcher and recruit future informants from among their acquaintances. In-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with the informants. The researcher had a general plan of inquiry; however, has no specific set of questions that must be asked with particular words and in a particular order. Four interviews (SW1-SW4) were conducted in the first round and six (SW5-SW10) were conducted in the second round.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research informants</th>
<th>Service settings</th>
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<th>Sex</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Unit-in-charge / service-in-charge</td>
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<td>ICYSC</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Unit-in-charge / service-in-charge</td>
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<tr>
<td>SW4</td>
<td>Working with disengaged young people</td>
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<td>SW10</td>
<td>ICYSC</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Frontline social worker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1: Profile of informants

*ICYSC - Integrated Children and Youth Service Centre

YOT - District Youth Outreaching Social Work Team
4.7. Coding

As Saldaña (2013) notes, coding is itself a heuristic process. It is also “an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas or algorithms to follow” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8). In this study, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed according to the following list of codes. Three types of data analysis approaches namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, were applied (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the open coding process, I read through the data several times and started to create tentative labels that summarized what I saw. I also made references to my field notes in the course of identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text. The codes were further processed through axial coding. It consisted mainly of identifying relationships among the open codes. I intended to find out the connections and causal conditions among the codes. Theme analysis method was adopted. Data was analyzed by identifying critical link in the coded datum and consolidate meanings from segregated patterns by their tacit and intuitive senses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was followed by the process of selective coding. Codes were further categorized and themed in order to explore an informant’s “psychological world of beliefs, constructs, identity development, and emotional experiences” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 176). I read all the transcripts again and selectively code data that relates to the core variable that I had identified. A storyline was thus developed accordingly. Affective coding methods, including emotion coding (Goleman, 1995; Prus, 1996) and values coding (Gable & Wolf, 1993; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), were adopted to investigate subjective qualities of informants’ experience in this study.
Qualitative data analysis is a non-liner process and can be recursive. As I was analyzing the data, I occasionally noticed new things and sometimes had to go back to old data and analyzed them again. These methods provide deep insight into the informants’ perspectives, values, attitudes, beliefs, worldviews, and life conditions; and are particularly relevant for studies that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal informant experiences and actions (Saldaña, 2013). An open-source computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software RQDA was used for the analysis on the coding. RQDA is a free and easy-to-use tool to assist in the analysis of textual data and it supports plain text format data.

4.8. Limitations of the Study

In Hong Kong, a large portion of government-subvented social services for young people are provided by registered social workers. However, in light of the decline of state-sponsored youth work in some of the developed nations, such as the UK, the role of youth work has been downgraded and marginalized. A significant number of youth workers were moved from statutory services to other community-based or faith-based youth service. Youth work might not be categorized as one of the mainstream social work services in these nations when comparing with other state-sponsored services such as children and family work or rehabilitation service. In fact, the relationship-based approach has long been applied to other social work settings (Ruch, Turney, & Ward, 2010). Further research could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of relationship-based social work and explore the practice wisdom of social workers in these settings.
Another limitation of this study was that information was provided by a selected group of youth workers with more than ten years of experiences. Further research could also target a sample of novices in the field as well as service users. This kind of study could establish a solid foundation for promoting relationship-based practice in Hong Kong and draw a more comprehensive picture on practice wisdom in social work.

4.9. Efforts to Ensure Trustworthiness

Practitioners’ bias is a major critique of practice wisdom. In social work research, it is suggested that practitioners’ lay habits of thought serves as obstacle to not only “professional” decision-making but also the implementation of evidence-based practice (Rosen, 2003). However, unlike other research paradigms such as logical empiricism which will do whatever it takes to get rid of potential biases, the heuristic paradigm seeks to offer social workers with some powerful and effective conceptual tools “to reduce and manage bias, and to yield reliable, robust, and significant scientific knowledge” (Heineman-Pieper, Tyson and Pieper, 2002, p. 16). Biases (which should be differentiated from unjust and destructive prejudice) are welcomed in this paradigm and being acknowledged as one of the core components in heuristic research. The heuristic paradigm teaches researchers how to recognize and manage biases rather than to overlook and deny them. It helps to protect social work research from losing its relevance to practitioner concerns and real world problems (ibid, 2002).

The heuristic paradigm forgoes neutrality of researcher. It is suggested that scientific objectivity might also result in “the collection of unreflectively biased data
because the biases inherent in the heuristic choice about the relationship with informant/subjects [research subjects] have not been recognized” (Tyson, 1995, p. 226). As mentioned in the preceding section, the relationship between researcher and the subject, i.e. co-researcher, is highly acknowledged. It is also treated as a heuristic choice about whom to be chosen, what data to gather, and how the date to be analyzed and interpreted. Heuristic researchers reject the process of formulating research problems by operationalization. Instead, problem formulation should be a recurring theme in the research process (Tyson, 1992). Researchers go back and forth repeatedly to verify the explication of the phenomenon as well as the depictions of the experience (Moustakas, 1990, 1994).

I applied the following measures to ensure trustworthiness of this study. I tested the intuitive interpretations of data with the co-researchers, i.e. the informants. It serves as one of the recommended ways to safeguard validity during the course of intersubjective exploration (Key & Kerr, 2011). I contacted some of the informants after the interview and checked with their understandings on my interpretations. I invited critical friends to review the data record, translation of transcripts, interpretations, and the research report. I also involved the method of triangulation by using multiple data sources in the investigation. I collected data from senior practitioners of different settings in local youth work and with different years of experiences. They included frontline social workers and service managers. Besides, this study was accompanied with a comprehensive search on local and international literature about practice wisdom, relationship-based practice, aesthetics, and art. Other validity procedures including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, intersubjective reflection, and peer supervision were applied as well.
4.10. Practical Considerations in Heuristic Research

The heuristic paradigm facilitates a fruitful fusion of practice and research. As there is lacking a consistent theoretical foundation for social work (Leslie & Cassano, 2003), the professional identification of social worker has been weakened and the profession is getting more and more vulnerable. The word “heuristic” by itself also refers to an act of knowing in spontaneous decision-making (Tyson, 1992). Influenced heavily by Polanyi (1966), the heuristic paradigm embraces the concepts of tacit knowing, intuition, and indwelling (Moustakas, 1990). There is a need for social work practitioner to be explicit about their reasoning process in order to justify the presence of such an “unreliable, personal, idiosyncratic knowledge built up through practice experience” (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 222).

Chu and Tsui (2008) echo with Polkinghorne’s (2004) assertion that social work is rather a “judgment-based practice” than “technical rational practice” and emphasize the importance of understanding practice wisdom through exploring the embodied reasoning process of practitioners. These assertions align with the understanding of practice wisdom by Longhofer and Floersch (2012) as a kind of “pathic knowledge” that “address how in practice we use our bodies, our personal presence, and our clients in contingent situations” (p.511). The root meaning of heuristic, i.e. meaning to discover or to find, comes from the Greek word *heuriskein* (Moustakas, 1990). Indeed, the heuristic journey can also be a painful experience to enthusiastic researchers. Key and Kerr (2011) admonish that it is inevitable for researcher to become emotionally intimate with the research project. Such
an intense engagement with the research question serves as a natural part of the process and is considered as a hallmark of getting closer to the answer. However, researchers might also experience a sense of loss if one fails to complete the research and has to withdraw from the engagement. Therefore, heuristic researchers need to strive for a good balance and avoid being lifeless, by having periods of relaxation from the research question and be capable to surrender to the unknowing.

4.11. Summary

This study examined the practice wisdom in social work relationship with young people in the context of Hong Kong. Youth work setting is adopted as a showcase of relationship-based practice. A qualitative approach with heuristic direction was chosen. Personal perceptions and particular stories of the informants were gathered as a form of knowledge through in-depth interviews and a rigorous process of coding, data analysis, and interpretation. I have interviewed 10 senior practitioners in the local youth work setting. Despite some of limitations, this study aimed to reclaim the professionality of youth work as well as relationship-based social work activity.
5.1. Roles of Social Worker in Youth Work Setting

5.1.1. The Role of Social Worker as a “Friend”

It was not uncommon for young people to consider social workers as their friends. The informants responded differently when service users consider them as friends. In general, highly experienced social workers did not easily mix up friendship with the worker-client relationship. A kind of friendship-like relationship was regarded by some of the informants as an important ingredient in youth work. They would allow the service users to regard them as a “friend” or “more than just a friend.”

“I often told them that we are not friends. (Interviewer: You said something like that? Really?) Yes! I would let them know that there is a boundary between us. In other words, we are not like regular friends. It is more than friendship between us. Yes. I mean like the friendship has sublimed, because I would be more concerned about your development, or other things about you. We are more than regular friends” (SW2).

“If we keep contacting each other, we have chances to become friends one day” (SW3).

“It is a friend-like relationship. I do not think this relationship is part of the duty in my job, but meant for me. I feel that I have the yuan (Chinese: 缘) to meet them
in my life. They will listen to my experience and show support. When I saw some news or issue related to them, they will come into my mind. I would also be willing to chat with them all over the night. This is an amazing relationship that makes me willing to spend my time with them” (SW6).

“Get along with teenagers in sincerity and equality are the most important things in youth work. We become friends to a certain extent” (SW7).

When young people came to see the youth worker, some of them occasionally requested the youth worker not to act like a social worker. They were able to discern the differences between worker-client relationship and friendship. An informant (SW10) turned down their request directly because she believed that her mindset of acting as a social worker was already deep in her heart.

“The young people will sometime ask if I can communicate with them not as a social worker. I answered no for certainly as the values and thoughts of being social worker are deep in my mind. The values of social work had been dissolved in my blood. The mindset of social workers is deep in every communication” (SW10).

5.1.2. The Role of Social Worker as a “Mentor”

Another role that the informants usually took was a “mentor.” It was more than being a friend but not as authoritative as a teacher. To the young people, a mentor was
someone like a mature peer of them. An informant (SW6) mentioned that mentoring was important towards the process of pursuit in identity for the young people.

“I feel like I have become a friend, a companion and a carer of them. I am not sure about it, but I think I am like a life mentor. Besides, according to some people, they talked about me frequently. (Interviewer: You mean they talked about you to other people?) Yes. They did. Because they later went to church and talked about me in sharing session” (SW2).

“In their minds, I am indeed different from them. It means like although I am like a teamplayer of them to accompany them, at times I would remind myself that I need to stay dissociated. If you cannot stay back, on lots of issues, you could not make professional judgment as a social worker or a mentor” (SW3).

“I think mentoring is quite important towards the process of pursuit in identity for young people. They are not able to classify themselves when they do not know many people. They understand themselves through feedbacks from others and interactions. That is why I think mentor is important” (SW6).

“You are the one who they trust on, and also a good friend of them. You are more mature than their peers when giving guidance to a situation” (SW7).

5.1.3. The Role of Social Worker as an “Idol”

Young people regarded social workers as an idol in light of their charismatic characteristics. They admired the social workers and were eager to learn through them as
their role model. However, an informant (SW1) also reminded that social workers should be exceptionally cautious about this role.

“You know lots of young people see you as a friend and admire you a lot. They want to hang out with you. It is about the two terms “Idols” and “Friends. Quite often a friendly social worker would be seen this way by young people... As I said, young people would admire you, it is unavoidable, but you need to know when to step down” (SW1).

Such act was very similar to one following a “big brother” of the Triad, “To the young people, sometimes the big brother of the Triad is doing the same thing as we usually do” (SW1). In a similar vein, young people might not be well aware of the differences between friendship and worker-client relationship. They might breach the boundaries and have resulted in unrealistic expectations from social workers. Therefore, informants reminded that social workers should be exceptionally cautious about the roles that they were taking.

5.1.4. The Role of Social Worker as an “Authoritative Figure”

Young people considered social workers as an authoritative figure. When they encountered difficulties in their lives, they asked social workers for their advice. Social workers also made use of this particular role as a vehicle for intervention.

“Sometimes it is special. The young people may come like for confession. They think about they told things to you and you scolded them, they would feel better.
Some young people are like that. They would give you a call for chilling out. And then they know you would respond by scolding them but they enjoy being scolded. They would not tell others about this kind of things. It means they would not tell about their wrong doing to other people. But when facing you, they would say, “After you have scolded them, they would feel better” (SW2).

“The way they see me is still like “Ah Sir.” And sometimes they would seek advice from me, who is like an old buddy. They would think I am their mentor. It means like at that moment, they would still keep addressing me as “Ah Sir”, even though I am not officially serving them anymore. If I ask them to address me using my name, they would not take that” (SW3).

“Sometimes you are their friend, sometimes you are a mentor, in fact sometimes you are their parent. For those who do not have parents, I somehow act as their parent and discipline them. It means you have got to be flexible” (SW7).

“As they will defend against the authority figure, we thus play a role of lower authority to get closer. But when being close enough, certain authority is needed” (SW9).

“I can hardly explain the relationship between us. It is a relationship of close but severe. I will classify myself as a strict teacher” (SW10).
5.1.5. The Role of Social Worker as a “Date”

Some informants used the metaphor, namely “a date”, to describe their role. However, it did not imply that social workers and service users were having any sexual relationship. Rather, the informants would like to point out that the young people did treasure the relationship with social workers very much, and vice versa.

“I always think working with this kind of cases apparently looks like dating with the young people. We walk along the street together but without any purpose. We talk about different things, sometimes more profoundly, sometimes the other way round. And then I would gradually know more about them” (SW1).

“Their social circle is so small. It means they are not like us who have lots of friends. Sometimes they would treasure you a lot and they want to know more about you. They have a strong intention to know. When they see you and talk about something, they want to know more about your thoughts. They desperately want to know. They want to come closer to you and not just come for chilling out” (SW1).

“Being cheated by young people? I experienced everything already! I was cheated many times by them just like being cheated when dating a person. It feels like when you have promised me to come back again but you came out cheating. It is heart breaking at that time, yes! I would give them another chance. I cannot figure out why but deep in my mind I really care about them” (SW4).
5.1.6. The Role of Social Worker as a “Sibling” or “Relative”

Some informants compared their role with family members of the service users. Young people might not only consider social workers as a professional, but also someone whom they can count on, as a brother, sister, or relative.

“I feel like my relationship with them is like their elder brother, although they already have lots of older cousins. I am not old enough to be their parent; however I would not see things with the perspective of those young people. I would hang out with them, but not to an extent that I would talk foul language with them, but we would talk about weird things. At certain moments we would be more serious and talk about problematic things, like talking about if they should work or go to school. They have the feeling that I am like their elder brother. Sometimes they unintentionally call me Gor Gor (elder brother)” (SW1).

“They think I have a role of carer of them. It is like because their parents are busy with work and so they have little time to give care and affection to them. So in this way I think I have this role of carer. It means I would chat with them, being their friends. And I more or less I could guide them. I mean I can give some guidelines to them about something like “what is your goal in life?” “What is your meaning of life?” I would ask questions like those. And then they would start thinking” (SW2).

“I am considered as elder sister by many young people as their home cannot give them the same feeling. I accompanied them to come across many difficulties and
show support to them when needed. This made them treated me as one of their family members. Love and care are something needed in their growth” (SW6).

“He does not treat me as a social worker indeed. (Interviewer: What does he treat you as?) He treated me as a friend or a family member. In reality he is not able to find a friend or a family member who can talk with anything. He is willing to show you his other side in dark” (SW8).

5.1.7. Similarities of Youth Work with other Non-Social-Work Settings

The role of social worker in youth work could sometimes be comparable to other non-social-work settings, such as fieldwork placement supervision and cell group in church. They had a sharing of characteristics in common.

“I am currently supervising social work placement students. Sometimes when I am supervising them, it feels like providing casework services to them” (SW1).

“I insist continuing the development of long-term youth groups in the ICYSC. In fact, it is a concept similar to the formation of cell groups in my church life. We emphasize group life in church. The group in church, as in youth work, requires members to support each other, establish cohesion, and share a common faith” (SW3).

“If I met a former teacher of mine, even though he has retired, I would call him “Ah Sir.” In a similar vein, I have always been a social worker in the youth’s life, that’s why he would call me “Ah Sir” if he saw me in the street (SW5)”.

101
5.2. The Attributes of a Good Relationship

5.2.1. A Relationship that cannot be Confined to a Designated Duration

In comparing with other social work fields, such as family or school settings, informants suggested that the relationship between social workers and young people cannot and should be confined to a designated period of time. It could take nearly a year to establish relationship with the service user before the commonly named “intervention” (for example, accompanying the service user to a career center) took place. Many of the informants knew their service users for more than ten years.

“The relationship between social worker and young people in a long-term youth group is not confined to a designated period. If members of the group perceive the need to continue the group, I will continue the journey with them as long as I am still employed here” (SW3).

“The job related to “people” need time and patience” (SW7).

“In my 17 years working period, the long-term social work group of mine keep an amount of around 5 to 6 as I put many time in each group. Many of my groups formed since they are in junior high school” (SW10).

Informants also reported that they would use a huge amount of time to talk to young people or get along with them. They believed that in-depth understanding could not be achieved in a short period of time. They would be willing to spend two to three hours with the young people without doing anything with specific purpose.
“From the first day of initial contact to the day I accompanied him [a service user with social withdrawal attitude] to a career center, it had already took around eight months to a year. Hahaha! It is in fact a very long period of time. Frankly speaking, I am sure it is the time that many of the other social work settings cannot afford. I know many colleagues might say, “It is impossible for me to afford such a long period of time. I am busy. How can I take two to three hours to go out with the client for doing nothing special?” But for me, there is no magic in working with this group of socially isolated young people. Don’t be ridiculous” (SW1)!

“A deep communication cannot be reached in a short time. You should show him the sincerity by asking question step by step. One hour is not enough to complete the whole process. Thus I do not think making a three hour communication has any problem” (SW6).

5.2.2. A Relationship that should not be Confined to a Specific Context

Informants rejected that youth workers should necessarily engage with young people inside the youth centre (especially inside a counselling room) and within normal working hours. On the other hand, some of them prefer chatting with young people at midnight. In some occasions, social workers had to work with the young people outside the normal working hours, such as during lunch time.
“For example, when they need help or feel sad, they will ask you out for talking, or lunching together. When I am at work, sometimes I would invite them for lunch to talk about stuffs. In this case, they know you have used up your personal time for chatting with them. It has shown that you really take them seriously” (SW2).

“Night time is the most suitable time to communicate with young people. As we do not have fixed service centre and rules, the behaviour management is not that strict. Such as a meals with young people (use meal gathering as intervention mean), or hanging out with them for about six to eight hours and is not being supervised or challenged by anyone, it is quite comfortable for me” (SW6).

“It sounds weird if we invite young people to enter a counselling room for chatting” (SW8).

5.2.3. A Feeling of Togetherness

Informants experienced a “feeling of togetherness” with the young people as they often did things together. It was considered as an important prerequisite for a good relationship to be developed between social workers and the young people. To the young people, the youth center was not only a place for them to participate in different activities. It did feel like home to them.

“We had tried hangout out as a group of two men. It really matters. How did we start? Simply because he said he wanted to take a walk, then we started walking together” (SW1).
“Some young people would hang out with you till very late time in night. Indeed they would not go even at 11 or 12 o’clock at night. It means like after 10 pm they could continue to hang out. When you need their help they would commit to help” (SW2).

“It is the feeling of togetherness as a group of people. They would be willing to participate as long as they are doing the same thing together... I think there are lots of happy moments, or unhappy ones, including moments of facing life and death things. We all cried together in this room... something like that. In indeed, this place, the youth centre, has given them a lot of pictures in their lives. They have lots of memories about growing up here. Apart from myself, I also encourage them to know other social workers here, so that it feels like home” (SW3).

With the help of the feeling of togetherness, youth workers were able to work with the young people more easily. They found this feeling helpful for inducing young people to change. The young people became less defensive and welcomed the support of youth workers as well as other group members.

(Interviewer: How do you help the young people who are in dilemma?) “From the feedback of many young people, in that situation I am not giving them a decision or analysis. I easily put myself into their shoes and have same emotion with them. They also feedback about having the same feeling with them is necessarily. They do not need someone to give comments and judgement to what they have said but
only listen. After listening by someone, they got confidence to put their decision into practice. They had their own thoughts in their mind but what they really need is the support from others” (SW6).

“This group of young people are isolated by schoolmates at school. They will share many of their things to me when having dinner or lunch together. These groups create a sense of belongings with listening and togetherness” (SW7).

“The interactive process started with showing my sincerity to them. Although I am a social worker, I have an equal status with them in the interaction. Less defensive made them willing to share with me their thoughts, experience when I showed my sincerity. I can feel we are connected” (SW8).

5.2.4. Growing Up Together with the Young People

Informants witnessed the growth and change of their service users over the years. However, continual support and opportunities must be given to the young people, especially when they did things that disappointed the social workers. As youth workers and young people were growing up together, their feeling of togetherness would also be amplified.

“I talked to them over the time and encouraged them to grow up so that they could do so gradually. And then I was profoundly touched when they said they wanted to study to become social workers. Eventually they become social workers” (SW2).
“Things change a lot in 10 years, from their secondary school to university, going through reforms of education system and job-hunting, dating... stuffs like that. Indeed they could experience lots of things in 10 years. These are different stages in life and so I feel these are dazzling and rich for me” (SW3).

(Interviewers: Do young people let you down sometimes?) “When they cannot make it, they would be sorry. It is a good thing they are sorry. When they still feel sorry, that means they are willing to change and move forward. People should be given chances to improve” (SW4).

“For me, this is one of the most impressive cases about companionship. I have accompanied her for ten years since she was four” (SW6).

“I found my past on them sometimes. The time which I share with my classmates is quite similar to them. It is like going through the experience again” (SW7).

(Interviewer: What is the role you play at the eyes of young people?) “Accompany them in their growth as they said... As they are growing up, they rate dating, employment a higher importance. Thus they hope to spend more time sharing the idea about the above topic. Each time when I am spending time with them, I will ask with their recent life and reach the above topics. This is part of my job” (SW10).
5.2.5. The Importance of Commitment

Informants stressed the importance of commitment of social workers in conducting youth work. They observed that it did take time (usually more than one to two years) for young people to change and it was very difficult for social workers to take part in youth work if they were not voluntarily involved.

“I think commitment is important in youth work, because you won’t achieve something in one or two years. If you want to achieve something, the effort you make would not pay off in short period of time. It takes time to get things done. And after you have achieved something you can have self-reflection to further improve what you have believed in. That is the key” (SW3).

“The coworkers should have the heart to get things done. Sometimes I will ask them to help. The way I work is I engage in regular program in morning time and then do case work for young people in the afternoon time. However some coworkers just leave office after finishing regular work in morning. It gives you a bad vibe to see young people being managed by this kind of coworkers. I personally do not feel comfortable with this... I hope social workers should commit to their work. Even if they are not as passionate as I do, at least they need to like those young people, or they don’t resist young people to accept them to a higher degree” (SW4).

“I think it is not a job only. We like to communicate with the young people sincerely. We would also like to serve others” (SW6).
5.2.6. A Respectful Encounter

An informant (SW4), who was responsible for outreaching and detached youth work, quoted an example when she had once dealt with a gangster of the Triad. As she also considered the gangster as one of the service users in the community, she emphasized that showing respect to him help foster the development of a good relationship, even though she might not agree with what he had done.

“I shake hand with him [a gangster of the Triad] at the beginning. I respect him because he is the leader in his social group. I won’t be staying in a superior position to him. It is an equal relationship. I would shake hand with him and give him chances to talk. He talks first and then I respond accordingly. (Interviewer: What is the purpose of shaking hands?) It is for letting him know I respect him and I am not superior to him” (SW4).

Respect was reciprocal. An informant (SW5) suggested that the young people showed their respect to youth workers by “giving face” to them. Another informant (SW6) did not only respect her service users but also admire them because of their strong resilience.

“Relationship is really important in youth work. If you built relationship with them, they will “give face” to you. It means that they are willing to take your feeling into account before they do anything when the case involving you” (SW5).
“I think they are a lot stronger than me. I am not able to endure in their family situation. I admire that they have this ability. I will also express my admiration to them” (SW6).
5.3. Intervention Approaches and Strategies in Working with Young People

5.3.1. Providing an Easy Platform that Caters for In-Depth Understanding

Youth workers suggested that an easy platform that was bias-free, non-authoritative, and person-centered should be provided so as to facilitate truehearted conversation. An informant (SW1) mentioned how he talked to a young person with social withdrawal attitude, while another informant (SW4) described how she provided an easy platform for communicating with disengaged young people.

“To young people, I gave them an impression that I wouldn’t talk about difficult things with them. I wouldn’t talk about remarkable things with them, such as what you should do in life, schooling, how to be a great person... none of those. Indeed we talk about their girlfriends, or if their father could offer them a job in his own factory, only something like that. In this way they would feel more comfortable and they could be relived from the oppression of the society (SW1).

“It means the client trusts the social worker. He is willing to share. Yes, I mean voluntarily share. On the other hand, the social worker should also feel comfortable to talk to the client” (SW6).

According to the informants, an easy platform could refer to informal gatherings such as dinning or playing video games together with the young people in their free time. It depended on the interest of the young people for youth workers to choose the most appropriate type of activity. During these moments, the young people felt easier to share.
Youth workers were more likely to work with young people outside the typical counselling room.

“Outreaching work is about going outside to see young people and take them back to our center. And then we do different things like chatting, playing video games, singing songs, or talking to them when they are smoking together. We could technically do anything” (SW4).

“The young people prefer to talk with us, play with us in their free time, rather than only meet by activities” (SW6).

“Informal meeting such as eating hot pot together brings a better intervention point. The communication and talk are start from topic relevance to life” (SW10).

It was reminded by the informants that youth workers have to be particularly aware of their authoritative position as a social worker. Social workers were not necessarily welcomed by clients. To some of the young people, social workers were authority figures and were considered loathsome. Young people could feel that they were being labelled as problematic if social workers used the casework approach to work with them.

“When you ask him questions, you can always feel that whether he has the resistance or not” (SW5).

(Interviewer: As said as before, what is the meaning of “start with”?) “First of all, you cannot be hated by the young people. Sometimes the role of social workers can be quite loathsome” (SW7).
“Some young people do not want social worker to do casework with them”.

(Interviewer: Why?) “Because they do not want to be labelled” (SW8)!

5.3.2. Making Use of the Advantages of Youth Work Setting

Informants found the context of youth work more favorable to engage with the service users. Unlike having a typical worker-client relationship as in clinical settings, youth workers made a good use of activities or volunteer programs as a means to get in touch with the young people. Besides, young people were also reluctant to being defined as having problems. They would feel easier to talk to social workers in youth centres such as the Integrated Children and Youth Service Centre (ICYSC).

“I worked in family service before. I think youth service is different. People who ask for help in family service aim for a solution from you while youth work is not. The young people do not see a problem as a problem. It is not feasible to work on it if the social workers regard their case as a problem. It should start with working on their daily life rather than correcting them immediately. Influencing their peers and thus had a socializing influence on them. You can see they changed a lot with unhealthy behaviour corrected, such as smoking, crime, drugs etc. Helping them to build up a healthy life makes them changed” (SW7).

“One of the advantages of ICYSC is treating the young people as someone who just come here for joining activities. In my own experience, most of the young people will have their own problems. Once they trust on you, they will find that
they want someone to talk with or accompany them in problem solving... For them, they come for serving as volunteer rather than a client for social workers. Yet, serving as volunteer is a means for us only” (SW8).

5.3.3. A Skill-less Way in Doing Social Work

Informants did not agree that social worker is a technocrat with the expertise in tackling young people’s problems by making use of the nameable skills in a counselling room. Instead, one should interact with the young people in a skill-less way, in order to serve as an empathic sharer of the service user. However, they argued that such a skill-less way of working with young people was also therapeutic.

“Actually I am not using any remarkable invention skills in working with the young people who have social withdrawal attitude. Sometimes, colleagues might ask me to recommend some specific strategies in handling these cases... But for me, it feels nothing like what we have been taught in social work skills laboratory that when you enter the counselling room, you have to do this and do that (informant showed the typical gestures in counselling). In my memories, what I usually do is sitting with the young people in McDonald’s, in the corners of shopping mall, or simply pottering around in the street” (SW1).

“It is already therapeutic if you can do a good job in being non-judgmental” (SW7).
“I think accompanying someone is therapeutic. It is therapeutic if a person does not take any social work training but knowing how to accompany and having empathy to others. However, not many people are doing this, even those who have taken the trainings” (SW8).

“Knowledge is not a must for social work. The most important thing is to communicate and share experience with young people with sincerity” (SW10).

5.3.4. To Seize Hold of the “Informal” Moment in Doing “Formal” Things

Informants stressed the value of informal encounters in youth work. Some of them advised that talking to young people during the causal moment were far more “therapeutic” than working with them formally by sitting and talking in the counselling room.

“I chatted with young people about things like job, stress or problems in life. Sometimes in a meeting we only got 15 minutes to talk about real formal things, while the remaining 45 minutes would be for sharing regular things in life. It is really important. These are things that cannot be done through whatsapp or facebook. If you want to work with young people, it is really important” (SW3).

“For example when I am playing ball games with them, I will talk to them in the break time” (SW7).

“Say if you observed them say something to others, you can use that as an example to talk to them. Maybe it is only short conversation, but you still think
you need to talk with them”. (Interviewer: What does it means to the youth?)

“You are paying attention to them” (SW8).

“The formal session only has a short duration with a mission to get done with a task. However I think it has a long-term relationship with the young people. They tended not to talk about their thoughts in the formal session but in the informal time and platform, such as time in whatsapp chatting, having lunch or dinners together etc. With showing solicitude for their thoughts, they can feel you are really listening to them. They have commented that although they can receive support after talking with you, they feel they have expressed their emotions already” (SW10).

Such kind of “informal intervention” was applicable to both case work and group work setting. According to experiences of informants, it was even not effective by using the formal way of working with young people, i.e. providing guidance and counselling to them in a specific context and within a specific time. Yet, informal intervention cannot be easily managed. The results were uncertain and could be influenced by other environmental factors.

“For working in outreach social work these years, I find the directive method do not have good effectiveness. The effectiveness of informal communication is a lot higher. One of the important things to youth work is forming an informal platform” (SW9).

“With experience of these years, using formal ways to set up a group and doing volunteer service are not having enough time for communication. If I need to
assign their works according to their strength, it can be trained the efficiency but not other things. The social workers are not able to care and develop understanding towards the youth as both parties are too busy. Good communication can only be done through informal activities such as when we go cycling together” (SW10).

5.3.5. Embedding Intervention in Daily Life Activities

Social work interventions in youth work were not confined to typical individual casework sessions that happened and ended in counselling rooms. Rather, these interventions were more likely embedded in daily life activities, for instance, having causal conversation over the phone, singing karaoke, going to dinner together, etc.

“Which young guy made me remember most? It is a guy who likes be around me. The relationship is so “sticky.” Occasionally he called me to ask me out for having meals together. It feels like ordinary life” (SW1).

“For example, when we are singing songs in karaoke or having meals together, I would talk with the young guy sitting next to me. I would care about each individual and their situations. Or when we have desserts together, we could chat about some topics that I brought up” (SW3).

“I will go outdoor with the young people who with a heavy heart. Maybe buying fishballs at the canteen and eat with them. If I were them, I am not willing to stay indoors” (SW7).
“The client is more willing to talk to you in an informal area, for example when you are taking the bus together. They will be less alerted to talk to you in a bus when comparing with communicating with you inside a formal setting or a counseling room. They will become less defensive” (SW9).

“I will spend lots of time in formal or informal group activities. Included times in volunteer service, flower market visiting and after service debriefing” (SW10).

5.3.6. Genuine Expression of Emotions

Informants suggested that youth workers needed to express their emotions genuinely to their service users. However, they insisted that they were not “utilizing” their expression as a tool. Instead, they sincerely felt the need to express their emotions in front of the young people. If they were badly influenced by personal issues, they might let the service users know and asked them to come back later.

“I told their parent, despite the fact that I often say about loving the young people, if I have young people with whom I have a good bonding, let’s say if they one day do not go to school, when I hang out with them, I would give them a kick! Yes. I mean a real kick. In fact, I do not want to physically hurt them. The message I want to put to them is that someone would be so concerned about them to an extent that they want to physically hit them. I want to express my concern of them and I would like to communicate with them this way” (SW1).
“It is a need. I need that because it is my real temperament. Our job needs our real temperament. I am unable to stop myself feeling angry and I cannot embellish my anger. If so, that’s not me anymore” (SW6).

“When you get along with others with sincerity, you own emotion will also affected by their emotions. I may cry for them sometimes” (SW7).

“Of course it depends largely on the situation. If I am handling things that are not that urgent, I will tell the youth that my emotion is not okay at the moment because of some personal matters. I will ask him to give me some time. I will tell him that I will get back to him later. And I am not going to force myself to take care of my service user when I am feeling bad” (SW8).

“I will tell the youth that I am not in a good mood. I am not in a good shape. Therefore I might not be able to get everything you told me as I will be distracted” (SW9).

### 5.3.7. Be Extraordinarily Patient

In youth work, practitioners had to be extraordinarily patient since the growth of a youth was a long-lasting process. It took a long period of time for youth worker to successfully engage with the young people and it took even longer for young people to change. In the interim, youth worker did not always working with the young people and needed to wait patiently at some point.
“When I was a school social worker, a youth is not willing to communicate with me for two years. His mother complains for his improper behaviours continuously. I am not able to do anything in those two years as he gets rid of any contact with me. For that time I write him some cards and send him presents at all festivals. He comes for me after two years. I think that two years was the time of relationship building but not relationship has been built. I think it has a flow for the communication with the youth. The flow may not be from verbal expression but from body language, or even remember something you have said. It is hard to measure if the relationship is building or has been built” (SW7).

“The growth of a youth is a long-lasting process. He can certainly feel how you respond to him over the time. If you always give excuses or show no interest to him, he might not think about talking to you in the first place. So that he will not disclose everything about him. Because he can sense your distance with him and this will result in a feeling of alienation” (SW8).

“Sometimes you do not talk with his problems makes him feel more comfortable when communicate with you. Or wait for him to talk to you one day although you know clearly what he is doing. If I need to understand more about him, I will get it done by approaching the people around him” (SW9).

“I remember clearly that, I spent a huge amount of time for all the informants of my social work groups. Should there be any events, not matter formal or informal, I will ask them out. I asked them continuously. Because it takes time for the young people to develop their sense of belonging to the social worker and to the youth
centre. I have to admit that, the process was so intensive and it required you to devote a lot of time” (SW10).

5.3.8. Managing the Expectation of Others

Social workers did not only work with the young people, but also the people around them. An informant (SW1) reported that he did not want to perform as another power figure so as to impose an agenda on the service user. Instead, he proactively responded to other people and managed their unrealistic expectation.

“Their mother often asked me to encourage them to go to school. I would tell her that I couldn’t do this. I don’t want to become another power figure and I won’t help people force the agenda into young people. Lots of people expect social workers to put agenda to young people and kids. I won’t do this kind of thing. But it is contrary to what people think would be good for young people usually” (SW1).

Yet, youth workers needed to deal with the unrealistic expectation of their bosses as well. Some of the informants reported that their supervisors, who were also social workers, did not understand and support what they have been doing.

“When facing the supervisor who do not really understand and trust on you always challenge what you do. Such as challenge on the duration of interviews, the goal of having meals with the young people etc. They always pay attention to
effectiveness and benefits. The lesser the time you use, the better they think” (SW6).

“Many people working in youth service do not understand the thought of youth. I am glad that I can work in frontline. Although the upper management always bid for projects or funding for youth, they do not really understand the thought of young people” (SW7).

“In my point of views, the main duty is to accompany the young people in their growth, and the activity organization comes second. But in the point of views of the boss, the most important thing is to do the activities and complete the report, whereas accompany the youth rate less importance. I have once communicated with a young person for three hours and the boss queried, “For what reason you need to talk to the youth for three hours?” (SW8).

5.3.9. A Long-Lasting Engagement

Many of the informants have been serving the same community, the same agency, and even the same service unit for more than a decade. Hence, they were not only familiar with the young people but the community as well. There were a lot of shared experiences between the social workers and service users.

“I have been serving this district for the last ten years” (SW1).
“It is happy to see them grow up. To do counting of time, I have known them for eleven years. From the time of they were form three in secondary school till now. We went through lots of things in the process” (SW3).

“My work life and private life is overlapped. I always unable to define which district is my working place and which is my home place. As I will stay in the district for work for a long time, I get familiar with the people living there. It seems like the district for work is my living district. Some young people feel like living with you at the same place and thus trust on you. Unlike some colleagues, they always get off work on hurry” (SW6).
5.4. Working With Young People in Social Work Groups

5.4.1. Long-term Engagement in Social Work Groups

Youth workers made good use of social work group to establish cohesion among young people. It also helped enhance the relationship between social workers and the service users. Unlike therapeutic or treatment groups that have a specific focus, social work groups with young people were usually developmental in nature and did not have an end date.

“Social work groups make a good chance for them to grow. They would treasure the bonding with each other. They work together. They are not doing volunteer works. There are sometimes some social events for them to build up relationship. There is friendship in it” (SW2).

“For the first few years, I took a more active role, because they were still growing up. But afterwards, it means for the last five years, they took the active role. What I did is simply cooperating with them. But recently, I take up the active role again, why? Because they have been too busy, and therefore I will do something to establish the cohesion of the group” (SW3).

“I have formed a group for them before they go F.I. She is a girl from the Triad and is now 14 years old. She will come for the group every week. She is never absent from the group or volunteer service, although she does not go to school much. This shocked the school social workers and the school very much. She used to solve her problem by criminal means until I feel her being changed. These
changes can act in her new social network. She understands the life of normal youth and act in line with it. Times of going out start to decrease since last year, and become zero by now” (SW6).

“My first volunteer group formed 17 years before. My group mates keep contact with me outside the centre. If we had special service that needs volunteers, they are willing to help. We meet each other two to three times each year. I will have a gathering with my group mates in team four tomorrow although they are not at this centre anymore. I am pretty sure that I am a social worker that never gives up” (SW10).

5.4.2. Sense of Belonging and Achievement in the Group

It was crucial for the young people to develop a sense of belonging in the group and had the opportunities to gain achievement by doing things that they did not normally do. Social workers took an active role in offering them with these opportunities. However, these could not be done within a short period of time.

“In social work groups I would encourage young people to work on things and then let them be leader so that they would lead a group. That does not mean they would not be dependent on you. It is however better because they have a stronger sense of achievement” (SW2).
“If young people leave the group after joining several gatherings, they won’t acquire sense of belonging because the time is too short for knowing other young people or social workers” (SW3).

“There is a need for building group cohesion. Other than the school, if you have spent your time in the centre for 3 to 4 years, whom you meet will become your buddies. As I will put great effort in facilitating these relationships, I will understand them clearly. We will work cooperatively in a big group” (SW10).
5.5. The Necessary Qualities of a Youth Worker to Build Relationship

5.5.1. Curiosity

As a youth worker, one should not only “show” his/her interest to know more about the service user, but ought to have the real motivation and curiosity to understand more about them. Only then can the young people be willing to open up their mind to connect with the youth worker.

“If you ask about something that they told you once before, they would be disappointed and I won’t be like this. I would remember what they told me” (SW2).

“I won’t resist them and I like chatting with them and let them feel this. Curiosity about them is important” (SW2).

“He knows social workers are really caring about them. We will call him after he joined the activities. We will do follow-ups. If he didn’t show up, we will ask him what happen and do home visit if necessary. So he can feel our sincerity and is willing to accept us” (SW4).

“Use a young person who labelled himself an Otaku (a Japanese term for people with obsessive interests, commonly the anime and manga fandom) as example. He refuses to join any activities, no matter a talk, a ball game etc. How I communicate with him is to ask many questions related to his hobby such as phases use in the online Golden Forum. At least he is willing to communicate with me as he finds I am not seeking information from him, but are really want to know
the answer behind. Indeed the youth is clever enough to find out if you are sincere or not” (SW7).

5.5.2. Genuineness

Informants reported that the use of self and genuineness are exceptionally crucial in youth work. Instead of merely keeping a clear-cut differentiation between the real self and professional self, social workers have to navigate beyond the boundary and be true to service users, so as to be true to oneself.

“I really care about them. It is important to be earnest”. (Interviewer: Would there be a lot of “you” in the relationship with them?) “Yes indeed! In fact, there is no objective answer. Everything is related to your personal character”. (Interviewer: You make use of your true self to hang out with them, is that true?) “Yes, absolutely yes” (SW2).

“These young people lack care from others. I think like this way. As a social worker, I got a chance to know them, I would stay with them because there are many people out there and it is lucky to know some of them. So, I need to work with them with my true heart. Nowadays when I hire people, this is really important. If a social worker is not really passionate about helping young people, I wouldn’t hire him because after he is hired work would not be agreeable to him” (SW4).
“I have once seen a social worker said hoping everyone plays and talks actively here and try to educate them for responsibility. However, the social worker always late for work, it is unreasonable for that social worker to educated young people for rules and responsibility anymore. It has also broken ones’ integrity. I think the real attitude of social worker is important than certain trained counseling skills. I am afraid having bad self-behaviour on one hand, but doing guidance on another hand” (SW6).

“The meaning of sincerity is, you need to share your own experience, such as failure experience, with the young people. This can let the social workers being honest to themselves too. If the social workers are unable to be honest to themselves, it is unable let the young people to express themselves. So it can said to be the acceptance to social workers themselves too” (SW9).

“Many of my ten-year long counselees are working now; especially two are now social worker. As they grow, our relationship seems become deeper. I will share my own experience with them which amaze them a lot” (SW10).

5.5.3. Sensitivity

As a youth worker, one should be able to discern and accurately respond to the need of young people in light of the changes in the sociopolitical environment. Informants reminded that it was not the young people themselves to be blamed, but the
adults and the society instead. Without such sensitivity, youth workers were unable to establish a good connection with the service users.

“It is the society which generated this group of young people, is it not young people have problems” (SW1).

“Things changed a lot and so people changed as well. After all, communication is one thing that I treasure and should remain unchanged. We had to communicate with young people 30 years ago. Nowadays is still the same, or we even need more communication. In light of these circumstances which have put people apart” (SW3).

“We have to know how others think about them. I understand that they are not feeling good by how the society measures success. They may compare themselves with others, for example the salary level. However, there are still other things which are more important than that. The above comparison may have a strong influence to them” (SW8).

5.5.4. Perspicacity

Informants highlighted that perspicacity was necessary in practice. Otherwise, social workers might not be able to identify the needs of young people accurately and offer them with the most appropriate intervention.

“I pay attention to this: We usually have no relationship with young people in the first place. I mean at the beginning I would not presume that we have bonding
with young people. This perspicacity of ‘no relation’ has helped me a lot. It helps me to keep a normal attitude when working” (SW1).

“Should I have any characteristics as a youth worker? I think we should be flexible when dealing with young people. You should not put your own standards to them and say these are the best. Sometimes you need to be loosened up and give them more freedom. In fact, every teenager is different and should not be fixed with the same strategy” (SW2).

“Perspicacity is important to a social worker. Some young people would look normal but they would however turn out causing problems. The top and the bottom students would stay their way and draw attention from others. I think the average students are those who would usually be ignored and they need help most” (SW3).

“You need passion but also balance and you need to draw the line accurately. What do you think young people can learn from you? Do they really need your help? Some young people are able to play certain role and you should treat them accordingly” (SW4).

5.5.5. Non-authoritative

It was important for social workers to take a non-authorititative stance in working with the young people. Informants noted that if one insists to act like a “pro” in the
counselling room and teach young people what they have to do, a good relationship can hardly be established.

“Sometimes I really criticize the professional of social workers. Sometimes I think social workers don’t have our real stance. If we are not conscious about this, we would easily see young people from an authoritative stance and they would feel that” (SW1).

“Of course social workers have their person views. For example, pre-marital sex. Maybe I do not agree with pre-marital sex but the youth did that. And then I keep telling him what is wrong about pre-marital sex and also citing different research studies to persuade him. If that’s the case, I must ruin the relationship” (SW2).

“What is respect? It means equal. I often use this kind of wordings. I won’t feel I am superior to them. I won’t feel myself like a professional so that they need to be inferior to me. I won’t see myself as a savior for them. I wish our relationship would be more like friendship. I hope to share with them on what I experienced before. I would tell them what might happen if they stay certain ways. I wish to let them know that apart from caring about them, respecting and guiding them, I also walk with them all the way” (SW4).

“One important thing for youth service is you need to treat the young people on equal status. When you try to communicate with them for the first time, you cannot get angry with their crack on you. I sometimes deliberately let them make fun of me; this can help building friendly relationships with them more easily” (SW5).
“I am not building a parent-like relationship with them, but a friend-like relationship. What they need is not having another authority to guide them how to do, but an equal relationship. Unlike other social workers who only hide themselves up inside the counselling room, I will play ball games with them every week” (SW7).

5.5.6. Acceptance

Informants emphasized that a youth worker has to accept the service user as he/she is. Yet, such an acceptance was necessarily cultivated though a trustful relationship between social workers and the young people.

“Trust is important. When they trust you, they would take your advice. I would stay in a distance, neither too far nor too close from them. You would step back and see what they really need. That does not mean you don’t accept them” (SW2).

“You need to make them feel you really trust them. Then they are willing to open up to you. I told some young people that I trusted them and I thought they would make it. And then they really made it. There is something that you told them they could really do and they would devote in doing so” (SW4).

“If the young person does not go to school, it certainly doesn’t work if you adopt a problem-solving approach. There is no miracle seven-step-solution to get him back to school again. What you have to do is trying to understand why he does not want to go to school. If you have established a relationship with him, you offer
him with some support as a peer or a companion, then it would become a different story” (SW7).

5.5.7. Charisma

It was important for a social worker to find his/her charisma. Otherwise, young people will not be interested to get in touch with him/her. An informant (SW10) pointed out that everyone could do the youth work, provided that he/she was charismatic. It was because being charismatic was not something that one could learn from social work school.

“Youth workers need to be energetic. You need to keep recharging yourself. You don’t necessarily be having the character of “super sunshine”, but at least you need to be with energy and righteousness. Otherwise young people would feel you are laid back and don’t know what you come into social work for” (SW1).

“I put a high premium on charisma, hobbies, and characteristic of my colleagues. ‘Use of self’ can be used to help confidence-building and youth communication. I think youth work is not something sounded highly professional, but a job suitable for everyone. The most difficult and paradoxical thing is, although everyone can do the youth work, it require professionality indeed. The relationship building required you to become a social worker, a youthful individual with good behaviour and the one who have similar action to the young people, in order make them change” (SW10).
5.6. The Quintessence of Youth Work

5.6.1. Knowing What We Come Into Social Work For

Informants were conscious of their values and missions as being a social worker in the youth work setting. Since youth work was indeed a demanding job that required long-lasting engagement with the service users, one could never enjoy the painstaking process unless one knew clearly what he/she come into social for.

“I don’t need to do great things, say big words or even go for election to prove that I am a good social worker. If you ask my service users, they would know I am down to earth and I just hang out with them on a regular basis. I think this way of my work is worth continuing. It is as simple as that” (SW1).

“I am happy. Otherwise I wouldn’t have stayed in my work for such a long time. I think interactions between people make me feel alive. I love getting along with them” (SW2).

“I always remind myself how I could inspire young people through my profession and my own person values” (SW3).

“From year of 1988 till now, in all these years my goal has been clear. I have my own vision and mission what are to serve these young people” (SW4).

“Although the work is difficult, it is happy to see someone changed” (SW5).

“I have born in a non-harmonious family. When I was young, I always want to run away from home. I want to be the one who shows support and understanding
to those who are facing same situation, although run away from home may be define as a problematic act by some other social workers. That is why I choose to become a social worker” (SW6).

“Being the companion of the young people is a kind of felicity” (SW7).

“‘Help people to help themselves’ is a phase I remember the most. Once the relationship has been built, the young people know that they will always have our companion and support. When the teens knowing they are accompany by someone, it is easier for them to calm down. They are able to across difficulties by themselves when they are feeling safe and supported. That is what I believe” (SW8).

“I feel like I am having good relationship with the young people. Other than their parents, I take another important role in their life. In the situation of facing difficulties, no one is with them except the social workers (SW10).

5.6.2. Unconditional Companionship

“Companionship” was a consistent theme mentioned by the youth workers. Despite the fact that these informants served different types of young people, for instance, in youth centres, in schools, or in the street, they named companionship as one of the most important ingredients in social work relationship.

“This kind of internet addicts is usually oppressed by the society of Hong Kong. They could not cope with the stress in the circumstances they grew up with. They
need people to come over to help them so that they could walk out from the shadow of oppression” (SW1).

“It is precious time to stay with young people in my work. All these 10 years I have been with them and we experiences important things in life. I got chances to give them advice and I enjoy this” (SW3).

“As she had to attend a job interview, so I went there with her. Some people might query, ‘Is it necessary to accompany her?’ For us, as outreaching youth workers, ‘to accompany her’ literally means ‘to accompany her.’ There is a strong power for companionship. I remember I was once unable to accompany her. Then she just overslept and missed the appointment” (SW6).

“The longer working days, the higher understanding of helping someone by companionship and empathy were not something that can be done by simply acting as a role of social worker” (SW7).

“Accompanying means you will always be along with him. You are always supporting and helping him under any difficulties and situations. I think the role of social worker is something like that. And the youth will never find him/her being trapped in a dead end path” (SW8).

“Youth work requires nurturing and companionship. During the growing process of young people, we should try our best to bring reflection to their own life and experience, in order to allow them to understand more about what they have learnt and their strength. We will have, or work on the platform to increase their opportunities to explore themselves” (SW10).
5.6.3. Trustworthiness in Social Work Relationship

Trustworthiness in social work relationship was one of the determining factors that could bring about changes. Informants suggested that once the young people felt being understood and accepted in a trustful encounter, they were willing to listen to others’ opinions and make changes accordingly.

“Young people would feel being understood. It means they are recognized and trusted by others. What is a relationship of trustworthiness? It is like they won’t dislike you after your criticized them” (SW2).

“When he trusts you, he is willing to find you, talk to you, or seek your opinions, no matter what happens” (SW4).

“When a person trusts on you, he becomes less defensive. Their thoughts and decisions will stick to and identify with the idea of social worker more. They will ‘give face’ to you. It is easier for you to work on their problems after relationship build. In the relationship-building process, you can also show your sincerity” (SW5).

“Everyone knows what the best should be for them. However, they will only listen to you after the relationship has been built and as long as they can sense that you are being with them” (SW7).

“It cannot be trained no matter how long you studied” (SW8).

“Security is the first things you need to bring to young people. If they are willing to connect and communicate with you depends on trust. Sharing part of their
thoughts to you is the first step of enhancing further in-depth communication” (SW9).

However, informants noted that it was important for youth workers to know when and how to let go. It would not be helpful if the young people were accompanied by the youth workers forever. They had to find their own way one day and continue the journey by themselves eventually.

“I am not looking for a prize for doing youth work. What I really want to do is to walk along with each teenager. Especially when they are helpless or feeling lost, I would like to walk with them along that part of the journey. But I don’t want them to follow me forever. I only want to take them for that part, and then they can walk on their own. I also talked to young people about this view” (SW2).

“I do not know how other meant by success is. To me, everyone has his own life. After helping them to leave the criminal organization, left prison and through with drugs, they probably do not need us anymore. They will have to go on their own way which may not be an ideal way in other’s eyes. At least we accompanied them at the time they lost themselves” (SW6).

“I think companionship is very important. But appropriate timing for companionship is also important. Young people do not expect you to accompany them for a long time as too much will bring stress to them. They should know I cannot commit to be attentive all the time as well” (SW9).
Yet, trustworthiness in a social work relationship cannot be measured. It referred to a particular sense that can only be felt by connecting each other’s souls together in the artistry of practice.

“There are things that cannot be measured. For instance, we cannot measure how a young person perceive the trustworthiness in a social work relationship. If you ask the youth how much I can be trusted by him, he might respond causally, say, 90%. But that is in no way a scientific measurement. It is a kind of sense. This particular sense can only be felt by connecting each other’s souls through human-to-human encounter. It is artistry when we exercise this feeling. It is similar to the course of appreciating an artwork. I would feel differently from you even though we are watching the same painting. But I might not be able to describe that feeling to you vividly, by simple words” (SW8).

5.6.4. Taking Account of Young People’s Stance

Youth workers, as adults, were not always right. Informants reminded that it was necessary for youth workers to actively and truly listen to the voice of their service users. It was also important for youth workers to respect the choices of young people, from the bottom of their hearts.

“I will try to think what will be the best for that youth. It is not me, his parents, teachers or others to define what the best is, but he can also have his own stance. I will firstly listen to what he wants to do, and then think and analysis the choice
together. Although I have my own stand point, I likely respect the choice and thought of him more” (SW7).

“We use problem nature to define a case. Such as the specific problems on job, on family, on social or on their own etc. But the young people may not see it as a problem” (SW9).

“As the young people said, many of the social workers are not willing to listen to them. The social workers shared their personal opinion during the conversation most of the time. The young people want the social workers to listen to them indeed” (SW10).

5.6.5. Purposiveness Without a Purpose

Informants argued that youth workers should not stick to a presupposed schedule or an agenda when they were getting along with the young people. However, it was also exceptionally crucial for youth workers to have a goal (which might not necessarily be aligned with the agenda of the society) in their mind.

“I like to use the word ‘purposeless’ because it could avoid making young people think there is an agenda in our encounter. They fear a lot getting along with adults because there is always an agenda or a purpose. From childhood till now, especially in Hong Kong, they live with a purpose. So sometimes I think when you get along with young people you need to stick to the principle of ‘purposeless’” If you cannot achieve something, let it go! (SW1)
“Social workers need to know exactly what we are doing. We need to have something in mind. When young people are with us, we know that what we have to do is to make them a better person” (SW4).

“Some people do not understand the significance of a long conversation with the young people. They will challenge you on the purpose of chatting with young people continuously for two hours. The young people may not change immediately after the talk, but this is what we need to do in outreach service” (SW6).

“My colleagues find a case of miracle change of a young person although I do not think it is a successful case that time. In that case I do not use many skills of therapy or approach to help with. Sometimes you may not know which approach or therapy really helps. The role of social worker is more about to make them ease about the matter, and let their family system reorganized. The feeling of security can help them come across the difficulties. It is like seeing a doctor. Sometimes it is not about what kind of medicine offered by the doctor, but instead, when the doctor say you are not in a big deal, then you will get better sooner” (SW7).

An informant (SW1), who has been serving young people with social withdrawal attitude (known as hidden youths in Hong Kong or hikikomori in Japan) for over ten years, was invited to share one of the cases that had impressed and influenced him the most. He portrayed a scenario that happened when he paid a visit to a young person for the first time at his home.
“One of them, his name is Ah Wah (alias). At that time, he was studying at form two (grade eight) in a secondary school. He had actually dropped out from school for a period of time. He was referred to me by his mother and other social worker. He lived with his family in a small hut covered by metal sheet in the New Territories. The only personal space for him was the small attic. When I arrived there, my first impression in my mind was, “Oh, the living condition is really poor. This family does not even have the opportunity to live in public housing.” Then, I entered the hut and went up to the attic. And the situation was: his whole attention was concentrated on playing an online game. That’s very typical. His mother had left home for work. I remembered that the door was opened by one of his grandparents. Yes, and then, it seemed that no one took notice of me. I was with him and there was no one else in the hut. What impressed me the most is that, when comparing with other cases, I am sure it should be the most exaggerated. I also shared this case with others when I offered training to colleagues. In fact, I sat on his bed for a total of four hours, without saying a word. If you ask whether I had fallen asleep for a short moment, I would answer “yes.” I was in a trance for quite a while. He kept playing the online game and turned his back to me. He did not care about me at all and not even turn around and have a glance at me. In the middle of the visit, he had once switched on the television and then went back to the computer without saying anything.

To me, the most impressed insight I have got is that, if you are getting along with young people, or with any human beings, should we always take an aggressive stance? I think the answer is no. The happiest thing was, after sitting there saying
nothing for four hours, when I got to go, I said goodbye to him. At that moment, he was suddenly aware of the fact that someone was there in his world. And then, he said “goodbye.” (Interviewer: Oh! He really said so?) Yes! For you and me, both having years of experience in youth work, could definitely understand this simple “goodbye” does means something. I was so touched at that moment because I knew some obstacles were removed. If you ask what I have done during the visit, I would say, it is more important for what I have not done. When I was there, I had a very strong sense that I have to do nothing but only sitting there quietly in order to engage with this youth. In the interim, I kept observing him and listening to what he said to others. I always wonder, especially after encountering this youth, does it really matter for social workers to always do as much as we could? To put it in another way, we have to know that we are in fact forcefully intruding into someone’s life. To some of the people, it is quite a terrible thing. Yes, from then on, I have opened up the connection with Ah Wah and our relationship was much better after that. For the second time I visited him, he opened the door of the attic by himself. Of course, he was still playing the online game, but at least we started talking. And then afterwards, we went out and did some other things later on…” (SW1).

The informant valued companionship as a distinctive feature in social work that could bring about therapeutic outcome. The story of Ah Wah echoed this contention and served as an important reference for practitioners to reexamine what youth work is.
5.6.6. Elements of Qing (情) in Social Work Relationship

Another consistent theme mentioned by the informants was “qing” in their relationship with young people. To the youth workers, they could feel the elements of qing and was heavily moved by the young people. They found this kind of qing invaluable and exceptionally beneficial in the helping relationship.

“Relationship is highly valued by young people. We have qing (Chinese: 情) and yi (Chinese: 義)” with the young people. If you are nice to them, they will be nice to you also. They can easily feel who are sincere and who are not. Some social workers are hypocritical. I think social worker should have the sincerity first, and in turn stimulate the teens” (SW4).

(Interviewer: What do young people actually need?) “They need our love! I always ask my colleagues, “While looking at all those things you did to the young people, do you think you really love them?” If you do not genuinely love them or your love cannot be felt (even by me), I wonder whether you are just trying to do something to prove yourself, or to justify that “I am a social worker.” I don’t think that is love. If you love them, you do not need to show off, what you have to do is simply getting along with them. That’s why I think I have difficulty in explaining to others what I have been doing. I am genuinely getting along with the young people and I do not owe people an explanation. I would like to share with others, but not for vindicating the effectiveness of my work. Besides love, you should also be curious about everything of the young people’s new world. If not,
you could never escape from your own age of puberty. And if so, you are not qualified as a youth worker” (SW6).

“They think they are loved and valued. They know that someone will listen to them with solutions come up in times of trouble. I have the ownership of their problems. Go hand in hand with them is very important” (SW7).

“The relationship with young people is something less than a family relationship, but more than friendship” (SW9).

“During the long process of relationship building, I get known with many of their experience and the reason of their changes. I can feel the intimacy with them. When accompany them come through those difficulties, close relationship is built” (SW10).

5.6.7. A Close Affinity between Social Workers and Service Users

An informant (SW1) described social workers as “a date” to young people. He used this metaphor to portray the adhesion in the social work relationship. Another informant (SW3) mentioned about a member in a social work group who committed suicide years ago. The informant reported that the connection between this member and the group has not been ceased, even though he was not physically present anymore, not to mention those who are still alive but had left Hong Kong. Moreover, an informant (SW8) was told by her service user that she was the only person knew him to that extent in the whole world.
“You might ask whether I have been using ‘disclosure’ and the ‘use of self’ in the relationship. Yes, you might say so, or you might use such terminologies to conclude. But for me, the adhesion between young people and I cannot be simply defined as a working relationship. We put our hands to each other’s shoulders. You could feel that the young people do cherish what you have said very much. I used “a date” to describe such kind of adhesion. It doesn’t imply that you have to see the others every day, but you know for sure that you are the only person to stand by the youth at the moment he/she is still unable to enter the society by him/herself. You are the only person who understands him/her. You are his/her only connection to the outside world. You are the only person who can accept what he/she has done wrong” (SW1).

“In each year apart from grave-sweeping [for a member in a social work group who committed suicide years ago], I would also visit his mother once or twice. His mother is close to us. I think the precious thing is like wherever you go, everyone in the group would think he/she is still part of the team. Whichever position you take, wherever you are in this world, the relationship is always here. It is really important to me and to my work, rather than the number of service users or programs that I have to fulfill” (SW3).

“I remember a young person told me that I was the world's second most who knew him following himself. I am not counselling him all the time, but being the only one who will initiatively talking with him when he has something on his mind” (SW8).
5.6.8. Reciprocity in Social Work Relationship

In social work relationship, young people and social workers influenced each other reciprocally. By affecting the counterpart in a mutual manner, both parties could experience changes and be able to contemplate oneself though the performance of the others.

“When they did something bad, I was like a mirror to them. In the mirror they saw something negative in themselves. In this process of self-reflection, they would think I am trustworthy. And I would give them guidance for doing good things. I would keep guiding them and when I am with them they would stay more positive. In other word, in this relationship of trust, they would know I really understand them and think like they are not that bad” (SW2).

“I do cherish the relationship with the young people. It is not easy for me to start everything all over again. Because you have already lost the youthhood to go camping and play with them all over the night. These activities in the past gave a strong motivation to both parties, in establishing the cohesion” (SW3).

“The motivation comes from interaction” (SW5).

(Interviewer: So you are unable to dissociate yourself from the young people?) “I do not think there is a need for dissociation. Just enjoy it” (SW6).

“Youth work makes me learn from them also. It is a kind of interaction” (SW7).
“When I meet more and more young people, I find the adult’s world is too hard for them. It reminds me not to use the thought of adults to criticize them” (SW8).

“If your minds are in sync with the client, you can understand what he is thinking without verbal expression” (SW9).

5.6.9. An Invaluable Opportunity for Self-Contemplation

Youth work offered social workers an invaluable opportunity for self-contemplation. One might study his/her own thoughts, actions, values, and get in touch with the inner part of his/herself, when he/she was getting along with the young people.

“I can hardly separate real self and professional self. The professional skills have become part of my thought by working time passed. When you are communicating with the young people, you will try to have a better behaviour. The professional behaviour and attitude become your real self imperceptibly” (SW2).

“I am training up myself all the time. I hope my good behaviour can affect them to do the same with me. That is what a social worker needs to do”. (Interviewer: What the professionality of a social worker is?) “I believe the professionality is what I behave, my values and attitude towards issues. I have seen many of the social worker use lots of powerful theory to guide and educate the young people, however they are not act in line with what they taught. When the young people get known with the social worker lifestyle from instagram or facebook, they will understand what their real character” (SW6).
“They may experience the situation I had in the past, such as in love with someone. I will review my past experience when I got through the situation with them. This can help me to review my life and what I really need and care” (SW7).

“We have to accept our own imperfections. It is not suitable to work as social worker if you always think you are the best” (SW9).

Such an act of self-contemplation could be referred to the concept of self-cultivation in Chinese. It was the process of building up a virtuous, self-flourishing, and self-fulfilling social worker. It is originated from Confucius and refers to the practice of exercising, monitoring, and educating oneself. As concluded by the informants, it was the work for a lifetime.

“I want to become a more sincere social worker whose behaviour is consistent with the word I said. Such as when I am teaching the young people of the concept of filial piety, I should have been filially pious to my parents. (Interviewer: Is it difficult?) It is very difficult for me! I think it is a self-cultivation for my entire life. One of my colleagues recognizes the same concepts and starts the self-reflection. Some social workers who are having less sincerity than before may get regret one day. Thus, I work hand in hand with my colleagues to keep the sincerity” (SW6).

“What person you are will affect what client you meet. The one who behave similar to you, will be more likely to communicate to you. When you have built up the relationship with the client, the personality will become more similar to each other. You are not able to use verbal expression to explain that feeling, however it is kind of an artistry of practice that can be sensed” (SW9).
5.7. **Summary**

In this chapter, the research findings was presented according to six major themes, namely roles of social worker in youth work setting, the attributes of a good relationship, intervention approaches and strategies in working with young people, working with young people in social work groups, the necessary qualities of a youth worker, and the quintessence of youth work. The findings suggested that social workers had multiple roles in youth work. Six attributes of a good social work relationship with young people were identified. It was suggested that a good relationship cannot be confined to a designated period of time and should not be confined to a specific context. It involved a feeling of togetherness between social workers and young people. A good relationship was considered a respectful encounter with commitment. A list of intervention approaches and strategies in working with young people was recognized. Seven necessary qualities of a youth worker, i.e. curiosity, genuineness, sensitivity, perspicacity, non-authoritative, acceptance, and charisma, were concluded. Last but not least, I summarized the very essence of youth work according to information provided by the informants. The findings were further discussed and interpreted in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

6.1. Practice Wisdom, Social Work, and Art

6.1.1. Practice Wisdom Defined

Practice wisdom was definitely a sophisticated concept to deal with. I defined practice wisdom as a sensibly use of self of a highly experienced social worker in the artistry of practice. Such an uncommon sense was intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature. It was embodied and could only be cultivated through the intersubjective encounter. It cannot be learnt by merely imitating the behaviour of others. For social work activity being an art, aesthetics was the form and morality is the content. Even though you might copy the beautiful form of a relationship between you and a specific service user and try to apply to others, the new relationship between you and the other would be totally different from that you copied from.

Practice wisdom was skill-less, disinterested, and purposiveness without a purpose; but demands a great deal of time, effort, and commitment. In aesthetic terms, social work was purposiveness without a purpose. Unconditional person-centred care could be understood as an entry point of facilitating the personal growth of both clients and workers. It helped people acquire visions of better lives that are free of misery and ugliness. Therefore, I suggest that promoting further exploration and empirical research on practice wisdom is of the utmost importance before social work is dehumanized by utilitarianism, neo-liberalism, managerialism, and consumerism.
6.1.2. Practice Wisdom in Social Work Relationship with Young People

By referring to the literature, I have listed three key components of practice wisdom, i.e. (1) it is intuitive, tacit, and spontaneous in nature, (2) it is an embodied *phronesis* of experienced practitioners, and (3) it has to be cultivated through the intersubjective encounter between social workers and service users. In this study, youth workers reported that the very essences of youth work lie at the heart of the relationship and practitioner’s use of self. It did not involve explicit skills that one can use and know for sure that young people could be benefited from them. The practice wisdom in youth work was not a collective of good practice examples that one could easily imitate.

The informants mentioned a lot of specific moments between them and their service users. These moments were unique and irreplaceable. It demanded youth workers to act spontaneously in response to each particular situation they faced. These responses were not resulted from a series of sophisticated calculations. Instead, youth workers were required to respond genuinely with their authentic selves. The practice wisdom in youth work was the aptitudes of highly experienced practitioners that were embodied affectively, mentally, bodily, and morally. Young people were well-aware of youth workers’ genuineness and exceptionally sensitive to the roles that both parties were playing. These roles should not only be considered as metaphors for portraying their relationships but were some of the crucial parts in the helping process.

Youth workers should be sensitive to the needs of each particular service user and respond to them specifically by performing somewhat differently to every one of them. Every person is uncommon. There was hardly a common way in dealing with any
specific group of individuals. However, consistent themes such as companionship, genuineness, acceptance, and trustworthiness were brought up by many of the informants. Without these ingredients, interventions could not be made possible and changes of the service users could not be fostered. Therefore, practice wisdom could only be cultivated through long-lasting encounters with service users by the experienced social workers.

6.1.3. The Use of Self of Social Workers

As reported by the informants, the “use of self” involved not the instrumental use but the honest expression of one’s authentic self, including one’s emotions, behaviours, personal values, and morally-informed actions. Youth workers used their selves to connect with their service users. They had to act virtuously and serve as a role model of the young people. However, to perform virtuously did not demand someone to be perfect. Youth workers should be well-aware of their own personal constraints and admit one’s imperfections. Only then could they accept the imperfections of their service users as well. In fact, most of the young people were able to differentiate “good” from “bad” and discern “right” from “wrong”. It was practically of no use if a youth worker was only able to give verbal advice in things that he/she is unable to do by him/herself. Youth workers, who were with practice wisdom, had a solid self-concept and self-understanding. They usually had a strong mission and knew clearly what they came into social work for.

Informants revealed that they could no longer differentiate their real and professional selves when they were in accompany with the young people. An informant reported that the values of social work had been “dissolved in her blood”. They reported
that they were, to a large extent, or some of them even entirely, acting as if they were themselves in front of the young people. Hence, the way they talked to their service users was the same to how they talked to other people they met elsewhere in their daily lives. However, informants were also very conscious of boundary issues and would do different things to protect both themselves and the service users. For example, they would certainly keep bodily contacts to a minimum and many of them would not reveal their mobile phone number to the young people.

There are explicit ethical guidelines in social work that help outline and define ethical principles in the daily work of social workers. These guidelines are useful for protecting new comers in social work from getting into trouble. However, they have not provided useful advice on how social workers can establish a good relationship with service users in spite of the fact that they have to follow these guidelines in practice. Informants of this study, who were senior practitioners with more than ten years of experience, paid good attention to these guidelines but seemingly concerned more about trustworthiness in social work relationship. As Smith (2001) puts forth, the code of ethics is largely a matter of confidence but trust is a moral form of engagement. Shenk (2014) also notes that,

“In ordinary usage, confidence and trust are synonyms, but there’s an important distinction. Confidence has a connotation of positive expectations about a system; for example, “I’m confident that this ladder won’t collapse.” We may be confident in people too, but there is still a favor of the mechanical... If confidence is specific, trust is holistic. If confidence is about what you expect to do with a person, trust is more about how you regard that person” (p. 33).
6.1.4. An Interplay of Relationships and Boundaries

As noted by the informants of this study, being genuine as a person is one of the key components in a reparative relationship. The prerequisite for that is the social worker must know very well about him/herself. Social workers cannot pretend that their own selves, including their personality, morality, and value system, are without complications. It is exactly the reveal of these complications make the relationship authentic. Yet, it is not to advocate for a boundaryless worker-client relationship. Social workers should be reminded that they ought not to take advantage of clients no matter how close their relationship can be. But they should not be restrained from treating their clients as if they genuinely love their friends, children, or spouse. In the same vein, relationship should never go boundaryless in friendship, parent-child relationship, or even marriage. One should also not to take advantage of anyone else in any form of relationships. If there is a collapse of each other’s ego boundaries, that is dependency instead of love. It always helps us to bring each other closer by keeping an optimal distance. Peck (1978) differentiates genuine love with the feeling of “falling in love” explicitly,

“Falling in love is not an extension of one’s limits or boundaries; it is a partial and temporary collapse of them. The extension of one’s limits requires effort; falling in love is effortless. Lazy and undisciplined individuals are as likely to fall in love as energetic and dedicated ones... Real love is a permanently self-enlarging experience. Falling in love is not” (p. 89).
Social workers should not allow themselves to depend on their clients. They should also prevent their clients from depending on them. In this study, social workers reported that they managed to maintain a suitable boundary with the young people. Meanwhile, they are able to foster genuine healing in a close and highly charged relationship (Ward, 2010) with genuine love. Professional boundaries have to be established in order to safeguard the professionality of practice. However, it is also the time for reconsideration and reconceptualization (O’Leary, Tsui & Ruch, 2013). A truly trustful relationship has to be reciprocal in nature, i.e. social workers and young people have mutual influence on each other. Both of them have a strong feeling of togetherness and they are aware of the fact that they are growing up together. Referring to Peck (1978), it is an extension of each other’s boundaries that requires effort. I refer it as a sensibly use of self of a highly experienced social worker in the artistry of practice, i.e. practice wisdom. The findings in this study echoes with Satir’s comprehension on the use of self,

“I give myself permission to be totally clear and in touch with myself. I also give myself full permission to share my views, as well as permission to see if my views have validity for the people with whom I am working... The whole therapeutic process must be aimed at opening up the healing potential within the patient or client. Nothing really changes until that healing potential is opened. The way is through the meeting of the deepest self of the therapist with the deepest self of the person, patient, or client. When this occurs, it creates a context of vulnerability – of openness to change” (Satir, 2000, p. 25)
6.1.5. Art and Social Beauty

Despite the enormous proliferation of social work literature on the artistry of practice, still there is little agreement on what it is. The debate on whether social work is or is not an art persists (Bent-Goodley, 2015; Gray & Webb, 2008). The philosophical nature of aesthetics in social work has been highly ignored. As Reamer (1993) points out, the discussion on social work and aesthetics lacks in-depth analysis of aesthetics theory and concepts. Aesthetic appreciation allows a person to identify good work (England, 1986). Callender (2005) connects philosophical aesthetics to psychiatry and clinical psychology energetically. By linking up the emotional and intellectual judgments of therapists, he highlights the importance of aesthetic sensibility and emphasizes the role of aesthetic judgments in psychotherapy. Referring to Kant’s key theoretical points of aesthetics, he posits that “we praise art in the language of moral approbation” (Callender, 2005, p. 286). In the context of social work, being able to possess a moral attitude and establish a caring and altruistic relationship to service users are essential elements of artistry in the use of practitioners’ selves (Siporin, 2009).

I began the argument of this study with the debate of whether social work is or is not an art. The journey was started by placing aesthetics at the heart of discussion. Grounded upon the classical foundation of aesthetic judgment set out by Kant, I echo with Li Zehou that the study of aesthetics “must expand its domain to include more than just art and literature” (Li & Cauvel, 2006, p. 36). Following Kant, Li further expands the conceptualization of aesthetics with Eastern thought (Li & Cauvel, 2006). He emphasizes that there is a tendency for the Chinese to replace religion with aesthetic education (yì mèiyu dài zōngjiào), as promoted earlier by Cai Yuanpei, an eminent leader within the
May Fourth intellectual enlightenment movement that aimed at synthesizing Chinese and Western educational ideas. The aesthetic concept of Cai provides a humanistic and utopian dimension to stand against China’s stagnant tradition in this regard (Liu, 2000). By adopting Kant’s aesthetic philosophy, Li adds that “beauty is the unity of truth and goodness” (Li & Cauvel, 2006, p. 55). He accents the concept of social beauty and argues that the objectivity of beauty refers to social existence (Liu, 2000). Li believes that a new sensuousness emerges as people become more aesthetically aware. This new sensuousness that derives from aesthetic experiences “involves the cultivation of the senses, emotions, imagination, and understanding” (Li & Cauvel, 2006). The highest aesthetic pleasures – those that originate in lofty aspirations and moral integrity – are the pleasures of the mind and heart (Li & Cauvel, 2006).

Unlike Kant, who pinpoints the *a priori* character of aesthetic judgement, which is based primarily on a subjective principle but with university validity, Li also emphasizes its *posteriori* nature by incorporating Marxist theory into the domain of aesthetics. In contrast to pure beauty, Li uses social beauty to describe how we can see the true and the good by appreciating beautiful content. He polishes Kant’s assertion of “dependent beauty” using the concept “social beauty”, which unites regularity and purposiveness and also manifests social utilitarian content. This view, indeed, allows social workers to connect the “social” core of social work (Kam, 2014) with aesthetics.

When we appreciate vast areas of green crops, towering buildings, great bridges, high-speed trains, and airplanes, we admire both the beauty of their forms and experience the purposiveness of society, which are the fruit of social labour and the progress of the society. The progress of social purposiveness has transformed
the raw materials into the regularity of objects. Goodness transforms truth. We can directly see goodness, that is, social purposiveness. Bridges and skyscrapers are built to serve human beings, but the possibility of their construction is a function of regularity (truth). Here, truth has become the content of goodness (Li & Cauvel, 2006, p. 64).

Whilst the notion of employing the Western philosophy of aesthetics to psychotherapy (Callender, 2005) is laudable, adding Li’s refinement of Kant’s original ideas from a Chinese perspective helps social workers make breakthroughs in connecting clients, social workers, and society as a whole. The well-known person-in-environment perspective in social work guides practitioners to understand their clients and their clients’ behaviour in light of their environmental contexts. Therefore, Li’s conceptualization of aesthetics from the Chinese perspective connects people with their social environments and allows us to substantiate “social work as an art” from the outset.

Goldstein (1999) points out that “the portraits of life sketched by many clients often lack the beauty, form, and balance we normally associate with good art, with pleasing art” (p. 387). As a profession that helping people help themselves, what makes social work distinct lies in its capability to empower individuals to gain a better control of their lives by assuming that everybody has the freedom and potential to make the best decision for him/herself. In the artistry of practice, social workers might assist clients in reaching new levels of consciousness and thereby forming new realities (Siporin, 1988). This new awareness, which is similar to the “new sensuousness” proposed by Li, “can be self-transcending in that it reveals one's spiritual and transcendent dimensions and helps
one realize his or her individual potential for self-development and collective potential for participating in a more human, just, and cooperative society” (Siporin, 1988, p. 183).


Social work has always been beautiful but it used to disregard its own beauty (Morén, 1994). Being inadequately characterized as a problem-solving activity, emphasizing person-in-situation (Hollis, 1964) and illuminating the psychosocial character of practice have overlooked and dissipated “one of the most important aspects of the specific nature of social work” (Morén, 1994, p. 161), i.e. the beauty of intersubjective encounter. As we always say, the relationships between mother and son, husband and wife, and even employer and employee are beautiful. Similarly, can we consider the relationship between social workers and service users to embody aesthetics as well? For Kant (1790/2007), to be interested in beauty is to set all interests aside so as to attend to the thing itself. Social work is considered (somewhat uncomprehendingly) to be a profession that helps people to find solutions that work for them and to give them as much control over plans and decisions as possible in facing the difficulties in their lives. Indeed, this utilitarian focus of social work is not interested in what the relationship between social workers and service users can accomplish. Rather, I posited that social workers were disinterestedly interested in the relationship. There was no “going after”, and the relationship ended in itself. This situation was comparable with the aforementioned three core conditions proposed by Rogers (1980) that empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and congruence are necessary to establish a
growth-promoting climate. Kant emphasizes that a given individual should treat any other human being “as an end also and never only as a means” (Buber, 1970, p. 16). Therefore, the beauty of person-centred care in social work relationships should lie in the I-and-Thou encounters. Social workers must set aside all other interests and attend only to those intersubjective encounters with their clients.

In this study, youth work was conceived as a showcase of relationship-based social work. It was chosen because the setting fosters a climate for social workers and service users to encounter in an authentic manner. To young people, youth workers should not be professionals who think they know the answers for “What’s wrong with the young people?” and “How should their problems be fixed?” Instead, acceptance, companionship, and genuineness are the core ingredients of trustworthiness that lead to a good relationship. There is always a close affinity between youth workers and young people. It requires a long-lasting engagement that caters for promoting a feeling of togetherness. Yet, youth work, sometimes, has to be done in a skill-less way. With the practice wisdom, youth workers do not only know what should be done, but more importantly, what should not be done at any specific moment; with the practice wisdom, youth workers know that they are ready to share the affective experiences with the young people, in such a way that the youth workers are changing the young people and they are also being changed by the young people as well.

So, what makes social work beautiful? As for the informants of this study, it is, to a large extent, the essence of qing (a primary and intense relationship) in the relationship with their service users. Without qing, the challenges, dilemmas, or suffers of others can only be known but hardly be felt. Paradoxically, the more one thinks and insists that
he/she knows about another person, the less about that person’s singularity and uniqueness can be found (Rossiter, 2011).

To sum things up, qing is a beautiful manifestation of the relationship between social workers and service users. In the Pre-Qin Ruist moral theory, there is an emphasis on dao begins in qing, and qing arises from xing (道始于情，情生于性). The conception of beauty in Pre-Qin Confucian aesthetics is related to qing (Qian, 2009). Qing was the foundation for preserving ties within the family as well as the entire society in ancient China. Whereas dao, i.e. the norms of personal and social conduct, exist from the start on account of qing, i.e. shared feelings among people (Tang, 2015). To this end, morality is associated with aesthetics and this view supports the assertion of Tolstoy (1898/1994) that art serves the purpose of connecting people together in the same feelings and moral character determines the values of the work of art.
6.2. Youth Work as a Relationship-Based Social Work Practice

6.2.1. The Chemistry between Youth worker and Young People

As can be seen in the findings, informants reported that youth workers served as a friend, a mentor, an idol, an authoritative figure, and even a date, a sibling, or a relative of the young people. There is no consistent answer to the question “What are the roles of social worker in youth work setting?” as youth workers have to stay flexible so as to cater for the multifarious needs of service users. Youth workers suggested that they were able to perform different roles in different circumstances. One can act as a friend or a mentor to a youth today, but an authoritative figure tomorrow, depending on whether it is necessary for coaching or disciplining the service user. Yet, the role of social worker in the relationship was not defined solely by the youth worker, but the young people as well. Young people had their own expectations. Some of them regarded youth workers as their idol, provided that these youth workers were charismatic in the eyes of their service users. They might be keen on doing certain things, they might seem knowledgeable, or they might look like a role model that young people were willing to follow. These youth workers were being admired and young people were eager to learn through knowing more about them.

Although there were potential hazards in the social work encountered by not keeping a clear-cut professional distance from the service users, the informants, indeed, adopted a more proactive stance on relating with the young people. They reported that the relationship with service users was sometimes as close as their relative or even a date. Yet, these descriptions were metaphorical. It did not imply that the social worker literally
dated the service user, or lived together with the youth in the same apartment. But they were in fact a part of young people’s real lives, and vice versa. The informants did not feel comfortable with a relationship with the young people that bounded inside a counselling room. They were also not comfortable with acting as a professional to teach young people what they have to do in order to become a person who can make contribution to the society. They considered the so-called “professional identity” unhelpful in establishing voluntary relationships with service users. As most of the “problems” faced by the young people were not in fact considered “problematic” by the young people themselves, they were understandably reluctant to change only for meeting the expectations of others. To some of them, in the first few years of entering the field, they had the moment of trying to act like a professional and taking a more authoritative stance. But as they became senior practitioners in youth work, they found such approach not only ineffective, but also adversely affected the formation of working alliance with young people.

Literature on “professional closeness” (Kendrick & Smith, 2002) reminds us that there is still a need for love (Turney, 2010) in the everyday practice of humanistic care despite having the tension arisen from scandals of child abuses in reparative relationships. Informants of this study, perceived a fitting middle ground in youth work by addressing the importance of “companionship” as a recurring theme in the course of relating with young people, irrespective of the roles that they were undertaking. They highlighted that young people needed a good companion in their lives and the social worker is one of the most suitable candidates for offering such an experience to them. As a companion, i.e. not only an ordinary friend but someone who accompany the youth along his/her journey
of life, a youth worker consumed valuable time and energy in providing unconditional
care and big-hearted support as one of his/her intimate partner. At this point, I have no
intention to turn his back on maintaining a suitable detachment with service users. Instead,
the effort of negotiating the boundary between intimacy and professional distance
(Turney, 2010) should be without doubt lies at the heart of the professionalism of youth
work. I argue that our profession should be in no way downplaying the preciousness of
companionship as well as its distinctiveness in social work relationship, between social
workers and the young people in particular.

For all kinds of close relationship in human-to-human encounter, such as
friendship, mentorship, parent-child relationship, or marriage, one should always be
painfully aware of the importance of bringing each other closer by keeping a certain
distance. Shenk (2014) studied the “chemistry” between partners in pairs and described
how they turned out to talk, think, and even look like each other in a sustained
relationship. He outlines three stages of confluence, i.e. presence, confidence, and trust,
in efficacious partnership. He also stressed the significance of keeping an optimal
distance between the partners by maintaining both curiosity and familiarity at the same
time. For Shenk (2014), one thing for sure is that, “There’s no formula. Optimal distance
depends on the temperaments and pursuits of each member of the couple, and how they
play together” (p. 128). The social work encounter between youth workers and young
people is a fluid, vivid, dynamic, and enduring process. To the informants, working with
young people is in many ways similar to finding a partner to dance with. By nurturing a
good atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, the ultimate goal of “helping people to help
themselves” can be achieved beautifully but in a skill-less way.
Knowing how trustworthiness could be established in social work relationship was a key to bring about therapeutic outcomes. Informants observed that as long as the young people felt safe in the relationship, they would be eager to open the door of their hearts and listen to others (i.e. social workers). Provided that the young people might not agree with what the larger society perceived them to be in the first place. Some informants made good use of social work groups as opportunities for young people to experience the social interaction in reality. Service users were provided with plentiful opportunities to collaborate with others and they eventually grow up together. They were able to obtain the sense of achievement by experiencing things that they had never done before. At the same time, they also engaged in daily activities together, for example, eating hotpot dinner, cycling, and playing ball games. By doing so, they acquired useful social experiences in other aspects of life and developed a strong sense of belonging with the group. Youth workers usually took an active role in the first few years and became more passive afterwards. As these groups were usually developmental in nature, they did not necessarily have an end date. It depended largely on the collective decision of all members (including the social worker) in deciding whether to continue or terminate the group after a certain period of time.

6.2.2. Being Fully Present with the Young People

Relating to another person intersubjectively involves reciprocity and the process of being fully present (Buber, 1970). Chenot (1998) connects the concept of intersubjectivity to social work, contending not only that every individual is unique but
also that the intersubjective field established between the practitioner and each client is irreplaceable. The theory of intersubjectivity upholds the inherent worth of the human being “as a primary value in social work” (Chenot, 1998, p. 299). The majority of informants in this study experienced reciprocity in their relationship with service users. They enjoyed their interaction with young people very much and learnt a lot through the process of being present. Referring to Geller and Greenberg (2002), presence is a powerful change-inducing agent in person-centered care. However, such an artful state can never be achieved unless the social worker is willing to include other (i.e., the service user) in his/her self. Robert Capa, a renowned photo journalist in the 1930s, once said, “If your photographs aren’t good enough, you’re not close enough.” Likewise, getting as close as possible to the young people should also be a perquisite for doing well in youth work. Taking a non-authoritative stance by stop regarding oneself as a “professional bystander” was the first step in making connection with others. Informants noted that they themselves, too, must open the doors of their hearts and be ready for allowing young people to come into their lives. Young people were exceptionally sensitive to whether the youth workers had opened up their mind or not. They would not be engaged if they found out that the youth workers were not caring about them wholeheartedly. In some cases, informants were told by the service users that they met social workers who were not really interested in talking to them. They perceived that those social workers were merely showing an act of kindness and speaking to them in a task-oriented way. In a nutshell, showing a nice gesture did not guarantee any success. It might even ruin the relationship immediately as long as your wholeheartedness could hardly be felt.
It looks easy for social workers to establish a rapport with someone. However, informants critically pointed out that the title as a “social worker” had a connotation, with authority, in itself. Some young people, especially those who were complained by their parents or school teachers, were very reluctant to talking to social workers. It implied that those who were in contact with social workers could always be identified as “clients” as well. They were unwilling to be labelled as problematic. On the other hand, youth workers should also be aware of the fact that there was no relationship between them and their service users prior to their initial contact. One should never assume that young people must be willing to accept the offer without a cause. Connecting reciprocally and being fully present to a service user required an encounter with a social worker that was entirely on a voluntary basis. It was the easiest but at the same time the most difficult part of youth work.

As a highly experienced practitioner, one should possess necessary skills that could help break the ice with the service user in a shorter period of time. However, to all of the informants in this study, there was no magic or witchcraft in their practice wisdom. It was not about asking any miracle question in what specific moment; or doing any particular thing for any particular purpose. It was simply because what you did or what you said to someone could mean nothing to another individual at all. Young people knew, in the depths of their hearts, what the most beautiful portrait of their lives should be. Youth workers did not and could not offer any easy solution to their problems. An informant even admitted that if she was encountering the same hardship as her service users did, she had no confidence that she herself was able to survive. Youth workers acted as a true companion beside the young people. It brought hopes, motivation, and
eventually power, through the intersubjective encounter. The practice wisdom that helped entering the hearts of our service users referred to something simple but true, that is, our wholeheartedness as a person.

6.2.3. The Action of Non-action (無為) in Youth Work

Practice wisdom in youth work was not only about what had been done, but more importantly, what had not been done. Informants in this study reported quite a number of examples of non-action in practice. The concept of non-action or non-doing is one of the most important concepts in Taoism. It refers to a paradoxical “action of non-action” that is effortlessly in alignment with the “flow” of life. “Flow” is a mental state in which an individual is fully immersed, focused, and involved in performing an activity that requires a high level of challenge-skill balance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996). Powell (2003) relates this “subjective sense of being caught up in doing one’s work elegantly well” (p. 457) as the art of social work practice. A parallel concept is the “peak experience” suggested by Maslow (1964), which refers to the transcendent moment of highest happiness and fulfillment that is achieved by self-actualized individuals. Self-actualized people often experience the subjective process of flow and peak experiences as moments that allow them to perceive themselves and the world in new ways.

Working with young people at an exceptionally high level of proficiency requires not only familiarity with technical skills but also that the self-actualized practitioner experience a state of flow. Therefore, the discussion of practice wisdom in social work should not be limited to the arena of “practice” or “how to do it wisely.” Instead, how
“wisdom” can be nurtured by means of intersubjective encounters between workers and service users deserves more academic attention.

Such a state of practice cannot be actively pursued but can be manifested as a result of cultivation. Non-action in Taoism is considered to be the highest form of virtue. Laozi once said, in verse 38 of the Tao Te Ching, “The highest virtue is to act without a sense of self. The highest kindness is to give without a condition. The highest justice is to see without a preference.” The non-action that facilitates inner exploration and self-awareness of service users take place when practitioners create a safe physical setting, and be a safe and trustworthy person (Johanson & Kurtz, 1991). Taoism rightly describes a kind of unconscious knowledge or practice wisdom in social work that exists when social workers are able to relax and withdraw from conscious and goal driven work (Koenig & Spano, 1998). “Like a social worker who ‘smells’ conflict or goes on a hunch that conflict is present within a family without having actually seen family members fighting” (Koenig & Spano, 1998, p. 59). In light of the Taoist thought of non-action, intersubjective encounter between social workers and service users is based on a belief that the latter has the potential to take the lead. Non-action “expands this notion of client as expert to include a spiritual awareness of the internal wisdom of human beings and of the entire cosmos” (Koenig & Spano, 1998, p. 56). In a helping relationship, “the knowledge, methods, skills and techniques of the therapist are not the determining factors of success” (Cheung, 2014, p. 319).

Rogers (1986) coined the term “actualizing tendency” to translate the intangible idea of actualization (Maslow, 1964) into a practical and operational premise in his renowned person-centred therapy (Bozarth & Brodley, 1991). He asserts that every living
organism possesses the actualizing tendency “to grow, to develop, to realize its full potential” (Rogers, 1986, p. 198). In person-centred therapy, clients reserve the right to make the final decision regarding how to pursue their own growth. It is the therapist’s responsibility to exercise genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding as the three core conditions in fostering a growth-promoting climate. With the fundamental assumption that the authority rests with the client rather than with the therapist, it is understood that this intersubjective relationship between the therapist and the client can promote the individual’s actualizing tendency and eventually foster realization, fulfilment and perfection of the individual as a fully functional person (Rogers, 1951). The Rogerian person-centered orientation shares a similar idea of “therapist-without-a-role” and emphasizes the importance of the “way of being” with the clients (Rogers, 1980). For the youth worker acting as a companion, social work could be practiced without skills and in a person-centered way (Cheung, 2014).

Just as Rogers’ person-centred thinking is known to have been influenced by Taoism, Lao-tzu, Zen and Buddhism, the application of the person-centred approach in social work is in harmony with Chinese philosophy (Cheung, 2014). Therefore, applying person-centeredness in direct practice should not be a particularly remote or bizarre idea for Chinese social workers to comprehend. It can be related to the aesthetic experience in relationship-based social work practice as described in the clinical vignette of Graybeal (2014):

“I call this my ‘Zen’ session. For one fleeting hour, I felt I had mastered the art of practice. During that session, I watched and listened diligently. I nodded a few times, but that was it. This couple was doing all the work – my only role at that
point was to serve as witness. I had many tools and techniques, theories and perspective, life experience and practice wisdom, all at the ready should the need arise. It never did, other than to restrain any impulse to intervene. The next week I commented on it, and they seemed genuinely surprised that I hadn’t said anything the week before. But they did say that for the first time in years they felt safe to talk about the difficult things” (p. 120).
6.3. On Becoming a Youth Worker

6.3.1. The Youth Worker Temperament

This study summarized a list of necessary qualities of a youth worker, namely curiosity, genuineness, sensitivity, perspicacity, non-authoritative, acceptance, and charisma. The informants noted that youth workers should possess these specific characteristics in order to engage in a voluntary and trustful social work relationship with young people. However, the current therapeutic trend and EBP movement in social work have driven practitioners towards working with service users in a detached manner. Besides, practical knowledge in social work has gradually lost its place because our profession has been influenced strongly by positivism (Longhofer & Floersch, 2012). Academics are less likely interested in arguing what a social worker should be, but rather paying more attention to look at what a social worker should do. Practitioners are trained to believe that people’s problem can be fixed by a series of designated actions performed by professionals. For instance, a young person who has a problem with drugs can benefit from substance abuse treatment and eventually get rid of addiction with the help of professionals including physicians, psychotherapists, and social workers. Therefore, a great deal of energy in the academia is devoted to investigating how an efficient and effective drug treatment can be made. As long as the young person stops using drug, the case can be closed.

Yet, informants of this study reminded us that youth work should not “work” like this. It demanded our curiosity in listening to the true stories of our service users. We should not make simple assumptions about them and act like “I know what is wrong with
you and I know how to put things right”. It also demanded our sensitivity and perspicacity in looking at young people’s life challenges. Although I was not implying that problems of every young person are in fact the problems of the society, I agreed with the informants and insisted that fellow practitioners should at the very least take a non-authoritative stance in the encounter with our service users. A youth worker was not, and could never be, an expert in dealing with young people’s problem. By the time one regarded oneself as an expert, one had already lost his/her trustful connection with the service users. However, one could always serve as a respectable and charismatic mentor instead. Only by this could a practitioner successfully achieve the purpose of “helping people to help themselves” in social work.

6.3.2. Getting Along with Young People Genuinely

As mentioned above, young workers considered it is of the utmost importance to get along with young people informally so as to engage and connect with them. Indeed, “getting along with young people” did mean getting along with them in a genuine way. Youth workers usually embedded interventions in daily life activities with young people. They were keen on grasping the “informal” moment to do “formal” things, no matter when they were playing, eating, or even doing nothing but walking with the service users. Counselling was not usually and necessarily conducted in a formal counselling room. It took place in McDonald’s, at the corner of a shopping mall, or in a bus. The role of practitioner as a social worker was far less authoritative in these settings than that was in a decent air-conditioned room with the service user sitting on a comfortable sofa.
Meanwhile, youth workers had to do things that a normal person would also do, such as eating hamburgers together with the young people, rather than sitting there and acting like a “professional bystander.” Informants insisted that doing such informal things together with the young people was crucial to the success in youth work. Yet, it required youth workers to offer a huge amount of time and energy for getting along with service users in such way. Therefore, it was not welcomed by colleagues and challenged by supervisors who upheld efficiency and so-called professionalism in practice.

Nonetheless, informants insisted that all the aforementioned “informal” things were vital ingredients in a good relationship. Chu et al. (2009) contend that social workers are moral actors. Without ever interacted with youth workers genuinely, young people were unable to find out whether these moralists were truly reliable. Youth workers did not only get along with young people by doing daily activities together, they also expressed their true emotions occasionally. Many of the informants reported that they had cried for their service users. They did not hesitate to cry in front of the young people because they believed that the tears were notably influential in bringing about impact. On the other hand, they had no reservation to express their anger, in a controlled manner, in case the young people had done anything to let them down. Informants also pointed out that if there were personal matters that had affected their emotions, whether or not they would told the service users directly was contingent upon the necessity.

Biestek (1957) highlights the importance of purposeful expression of feelings and controlled emotional involvement in the seven principles of the casework relationship. However, “these principles clearly follow the logical assumption that feelings can be purposefully expressed and that social workers should be able to control their own
emotions” (Cheung, 2015, p. 94). An informant in this study denied that she had ever utilized her emotion in a so-called “purposeful” way. When she was asked about why and how she “made use of” her anger as a vehicle for intervention, she noted that she expressed her true emotion to the young people simply because she really felt angry at that moment. She emphasized that the young people perceived her anger in a positive way and had not been disengaged. Due to her genuine expression, they were aware of what they had done wrong and made changes accordingly.

I did not intend to draw a naive conclusion that social workers should always express their true emotions to service users but being inattentive to the consequences. However, there was a need for social workers to get along with young people genuinely, by not merely utilizing their emotions in an instrumental way. The practice wisdom here was not about how genuineness could be demonstrated by social workers. It was about how social workers were genuinely being who they really were. Either the code of ethics in social work or the seven principles proposed by Biestek (1957) ensure that social workers could do what they are expected to. With these guidelines, service users have confidence in asking social workers for help. Confidence could be understood as a basis of professionality. But there was no contradiction between confidence and trust. I suggested that trust was a necessary and sufficient condition for a good relationship that two persons are truly connected whereas confidence was a necessary but not sufficient condition for trust. Other necessary conditions for trust included but not limited to acceptance, companionship, and genuineness.
6.3.3. **Self-Cultivation of a Youth Worker**

A youth worker was better to be a charismatic individual. Informants revealed that it is of one’s temperament attracted young people to him/her. As young people usually regarded youth workers as their idols, big brother/sister, or role models, it was not only what you said to them that matters, it was who you are and what you did too. McBeath and Webb (2002) highlight the relevance of virtue ethics to social work and propose that a virtuous social worker has to be self-flourishing and self-fulfilling. He/she is therefore capable of “bringing together the capacity for theoretical and practical action makes possible a hermeneutic or interpretive praxis best appraised in dialogue with fellow-practitioners and clients” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1016). This view on connecting morality to social work is also supported by other scholars such as Banks (2008) and Gray (2010). In an earlier study of Young (2006) on the art of youth work, she remarks that youth workers do serve as a role model and provide a good platform for young people to learn to be virtuous and explore themselves below the superficial from the social work relationship.

Informants of this study, who were all Chinese practitioners, generally supported the perspective of Young (2006) but added that the relationship with young people fostered self-contemplation and self-cultivation of youth workers as well. Due to its reciprocal nature, the relationship between youth workers and young people provided practitioners an invaluable opportunity to study their own thoughts, actions, values, and get in touch with the inner part of themselves. However, it demanded the readiness of youth workers to open their own doors and be prepared to accept themselves as they are. Findings and discoveries throughout the journey of self-contemplation were totally
unpredictable. It could be a painstaking way for these grown-up “professionals” to overthrow their understandings of themselves yesterday and start everything all over again for tomorrow. Yet, as a highly experienced practitioner, one was not necessarily be able to dance perfectly with anybody, but has to be well aware of one’s temperament so as to dance better with different kinds of dancers. Only then can “life on life” actually be fostered. According to Wang (2012), openness and sincerity of heart is the root of Confucian moral cultivation. This study of practice wisdom in social work relationship with young people revealed a simple but important fact that if youth work (and social work) was truly an art, it was not merely an art of doing, but was unquestionably an art of being.

### 6.3.4. Fostering Genuine Healing in a Relationship with Genuine Love

I rebuffed the notion that social work was merely a technical rational practice; however, it was not without merit by looking at social work from a scientific dimension. Knowledge, either in its tacit or explicit form, could be in many ways scrutinized scientifically and supported by evidences. Science in social work helped turning novice into expert and gave practitioners a pledge to practice professionally. Thus, service users had the confidence in working with social workers in the first place. The findings of this study, however, added that connecting with service users reciprocally and being fully present in the intersubjective encounter demanded highly experienced practitioners to master the art of social work by actively involved in the relationship with their practice wisdom.
Informants of this study explained that core ingredients of trustworthiness such as acceptance, companionship, and genuineness were crucial to a good relationship with service users. Nevertheless, these ingredients were also deemed necessary to developing good relationships in other aspects of life, for instance, friendship, parent-child relationship, and marriage. Many informants admitted that they literally “loved” their service users as if they loved their own children or intimate friends. It was also not difficult to understand why some informants used the metaphor “a date” to describe their closeness with service users.

Social workers and young people were not romantically “falling in love” with simple cathexis. Peck (1978), a psychiatrist and best-selling author, differentiates “the act of cathecting the beloved object” with “genuine love” clearly in his seminal work: *The road less traveled*. He observes that there is a common misconception to regard “falling in love” as love or a manifestation of love. He contends that love, transference, and countertransference should not be taboos in psychotherapy. To Peck (1978), “there is nothing inappropriate about patients coming to love a therapist who truly listens to them hour after hour in a nonjudgmental way, who truly accepts them as they probably have never been accepted before, who totally refrains from using them and who has been helpful in alleviating their suffering” (p. 174). In short, he defines “genuine love” as an activity to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own and another’s spiritual growth. To the knowledge of the author, previous literature in social work seemed to support that practice wisdom was composed of practitioners’ years of experiences, knowledge, good practice, and so forth. Findings of this study added that genuine love and care were of the utmost importance in the artistry of social work practice, in its
humanistic dimension. These findings echoed the reminder of Turney (2010) that the notion of love has to be reclaimed in relationship-based care and social workers should be encouraged to master their warmth and affection thoughtfully. Unconditional companionship was unquestionably an act of love. Youth workers were willing to extend their ego boundaries in their encounters with young people. They loved their service users because they perceived them of great value that worth attending to. At the same time, the youth workers also loved themselves because they were willing to work with the young people for the sake of the practitioners’ own personal growth. Referring to Peck (1978),

“If the psychotherapist cannot genuinely love a patient, genuine healing will not occur. No matter how well credentialed and trained psychotherapists may be, if they cannot extend themselves through love to their patients, the results of their psychotherapeutic practice will be generally unsuccessful. Conversely, a totally uncredentialed and minimally trained lay therapist who exercises a great capacity to love will achieve psychotherapeutic results that equal those of the very best psychiatrists” (p. 175).

Informants revealed that the elements of qing (Chinese: 情), i.e. a primary and intense relationship (Tsui, 2004, 2005), was consistently contained in the intersubjective encounter between social workers and young people. In Chinese, the word qing is not directly translated to love. It is known to be a prominent characteristic of Chinese culture and Confucian conception. Yet, there is a major distinction between the West and the East to apprehend the notion of love. For the former, love is more of a pursuit of wonder; whereas for the latter, love is more of an emphasis on concern (Ng, 1975). Qing in
Chinese culture encompasses the sense of *gantong* (Chinese: 感通), i.e. an affinity between people and people, ancestors and descendants, and human and the universe. It refers to an open and affective comportment with spiritual, human, and natural beings in the surrounding world (Wang, 2012). For Ng (1975), *qing* is sublime. Hence, the manifestation of *qing* helped the understanding of genuine love in social work relationship further enriched from a Chinese perspective. As Liu (2014) puts forth,

“*The personal sphere of Confucianism covers primarily the self-cultivation of each individual, out of which he is to attain the inner harmony. Then, by virtue of the sympathy ‘to feel others in oneself’, the private experience of self-cultivation is indeed put in a larger perspective of ‘inter-subjectivity’ for mutual empathy. From the individual located at the center to strangers at different levels of relation, the inner driving force is to extend emotions [Qing]...’*” (p. 49)

*Qing* in youth work, as described by the informants, was multifaceted and reciprocal in nature. One did not necessarily have plentiful of practice experiences and be well-trained in order to experience *qing* in relationship. But this affinity in the intersubjective relationship could be cultivated proactively by the self-flourished and self-fulfilled individuals. In a nutshell, youth workers should nurture an uncommon sense (i.e. practice wisdom) on the basis of self-cultivation so as to foster genuine healing in a primary and intense relationship with genuine love.
6.4. Summary

It has long been unclear about the roles of youth worker in the social work relationship. People always wonder, “What do youth workers do, exactly?” To many people, including parents, service users, other professionals, the general public, and indeed amateur youth workers themselves and some of their workplace supervisors, practicing youth work is somewhat about talking to young people causally, going out with them, organizing meaningful activities for them, supporting them through the hard times, and so forth. It does not sound as “professional” as practicing social work in other service settings, such as working with victims of child abuse, people with disabilities, or dementia patients.

As in many developed nations, such as Hong Kong, designated statutory duties are assigned to social work practitioners. Social workers have the power to enforce the law in statutory services such as child protection, probation, and medical social work service. Social work is therefore having a major ideological split with the person-centred orientation and gradually formalized by imposing objectivity and rationality into practice (Murphy, Duggan, & Joseph, 2013). Contemporary practice has also been characterized according to technical competence and system confidence (Smith, 2001). Thus, not only the relationships with service users have been reshaped in procedural, legal and administrative terms (Howe, 1998), social worker has also been repositioned as a control agent (Specht & Courtney, 1994) rather than a dependable companion of those who are in need. This study aimed to revitalize the debate on whether social work activity is or is not an art. Practice wisdom was defined as a sensibly use of self of a highly experienced social worker in the artistry of practice. Its connection with art and social beauty was...
addressed. The intersubjective encounter between social workers and young people was as an example of unconditional and person-centred social work relationship.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Summary of Findings and Analysis

Practice wisdom is “precipitated or crystallized as a result of intersubjective intuition, and it is often embodied in actions whose motivations remain in the background of consciousness” (Chu & Tsui, 2008, p. 49). An artist is unable to create an influential piece of artwork unless he/she has some masterly skills, an intense emotion on the specific subject, a life of experiences, and/or some unforgettable memories, etc. Likewise, a social worker is unable to grasp an adequate picture of a client’s world unless he/she has rich knowledge in social work, fruitful experiences in direct practice, strong sentiments towards specific issues, some important life events or family history, and/or a solid base of values and personal beliefs. Social workers, like photographers, make sense of the world of their service users immediately by getting an adequate picture of it. Through the lens of a social worker, a more comprehensive picture of an individual can be portrayed and revealed. As in photography, there is a distinct sensibility known as the “photographer’s eye.” A photographer makes an interpretation of the scene/subject by taking pictures and conveys messages to the end viewer. With the photographer’s eye, the photographer can make sense of all the information in the blink of an eye and response by taking the best shot at the right time. Henri Cartier-Bresson, a renowned documentary photojournalist, uses “the decisive moment” to describe such a timing that the photographer’s eye can capture. The photographer’s eye refers to a distinct sensibility in photography that does not only involve skills and experiences, but also, to a large extent,
the personal qualities of the photographer. Such a kind of awareness is very similar to practice wisdom in social work. As England (1986) sets forth, “the nature of human experience means that the worker’s picture, like an image in art, must be not merely a unification of disparate ideas but that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (p. 107). Yet, the best shot can hardly be taken unless a trustful relationship is established in advance. Graybeal (2007) argues that substantial evidence supports an improvisatory conception of the art of social work. However, it depends on the quality of alliance formed between social worker and service user since “the essence of social work lies in facilitating human relationships in ways that support and increase potential, enhance choice, and contribute to the empowerment of individuals and groups” (Graybeal, 2007, p. 521).

Looking at the tacit and embodied dimensions in social work knowledge refers to “the way of finding coherence and meaning in whatever being studied” (Imre, 1985). Despite significant number of literature devoted to the importance of uncovering the nature of practice wisdom in the profession, little attention has been given to carefully reveal how social workers exercise their wisdom in engaging with their service users. Engagement, which refers to establishing effective working relationships with clients, contributes to an important role in social work relationship. An effective engagement produces a shared platform for workers and clients to exchange their views and helps establish a shared commitment to work with clients’ issues. It is generally agreed that social workers should engage clients well in order to promote a trustful relationship. However, social work engagement has received surprisingly little attention in social work literature. As Smith et al. (2012) point out, “the reality is that most social work
relationships are involuntary; they happen in situations in which the recipient of the service does not freely enter into the contract, but in which they are mandated by law and may resent having to do so” (p. 1462).

Informants of this study provided valuable insights on how social workers could work well with the service users. To young people, youth workers are usually their friends, mentors, and role models, but sometimes as strict as authoritative figures and parents or as intimate as siblings and dates. The role is not static. It differs from one service user to another. Experienced youth workers pay a lot of attention to these roles and they are aware of the power dynamics with young people. However, they do not perform these roles as actors. It demands the use of their selves in serving these roles. For most of the time, they are merely “performing” who they really are. Young people are sensitive to these roles as well. They understand the boundary of worker-client relationship but they are usually reluctant to regard themselves as clients. Similarly, youth workers are sometimes hesitant to call young people as their clients. Especially for the young people that they know for a long period of time, there is a specific bonding among them. The typical definition of worker-client relationship that social worker as a professional and client as a beneficiary cannot adequately describe their affiliations.

Interventions in youth work do not often take place in the counselling room. Youth workers cherish the opportunities of informal encounters with young people, and in some occasions, outside the normal working hours. The relationship between youth workers and young people cannot be confined to a designated period of time or a specific context. It can take months or years only for establishing relationships. They might spend a couple of hours every time to engage a deep level of communication. However, once the
relationship is successfully established, it can usually last for a long time between the young people and the youth worker as well as the young people and the community. It does not imply that youth workers do not deal with remedial issues of their service users. Instead, they tend to create an easier platform, which is bias-free, non-authoritative, and person-centered, to cater for truehearted conversation and in-depth understanding. The environment promotes a strong feeling of togetherness that difficult moments and critical challenges in lives can be faced together. Group intervention approach is commonly adopted. As the members in the group witness the growth of each member over the years, the cohesive force of the group and thus the healing power can be amplified.

Unconditional companionship is a key to success in youth work. Social work interventions for young people require a long-term commitment of the social worker. As the growth of an individual is a life-long process, youth workers have to be extraordinarily patient and be presence with the service users continually. Young people are sensitive to the distance in the relationship and can be disengaged if youth workers always give excuses or show no interest to them. Therefore, youth worker should be exceptionally curious about anything that is related to the service users and their culture. Perspicacity is important. Youth workers should also be sensitive to social change and be reminded that young people are vulnerable and should not be the one to be blamed.

All in all, youth people will have the openness to change as long as core ingredients of trustworthiness including acceptance, companionship, and genuineness can be found in the trustful encounter. Trustworthiness in the social work relationship provide a path, and perhaps the only path, for youth workers to enter young people’s new world. However, it is also crucial to know when and how to let go. Schwartz and Sharpe (2010) explain that
the essence of practical wisdom can be understood by relating to the example of teaching a child to swim.

“You don't just throw him in the deep water and hope for the best. You might let him play in shallow water and then carry him into slightly deeper water and hold him while he learns to float. You might demonstrate what you are saying. You might put flotation devices on him, holding him but watching carefully for a sign that it's okay to let go. You mentor your child by scaffolding, modeling, and coaching. And it's not just the wisdom to know when to let go: teaching children how to swim means helping them have the confidence (courage, patience, discipline, fortitude) to persist, and the judgment to know what water to go into, how far to go, and when to get out” (p. 277).

For a youth worker, the process of coaching a young person in travelling along the journey of his/her own beautiful life was very much similar to preparing him/her to swim independently in open water. A child could learn swimming from you at the beginning but he/she can eventually swim better than you. As in youth work, young people were not copycats of social workers. They could always do better than anyone. By mastering the art of keeping an optimal distance with the young people, youth workers provided them with opportunities and guided them in the way they should go.
7.2. Recommendations

7.2.1. Implications for Youth Work in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, social work services are provisioned by the Social Welfare Department. Services for young people fall into one of the four main service programmes, i.e. Family and Child Welfare, Elderly, Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services, and Youth and Corrections. As can be seen in this categorization, youth work was assembled with other services for offenders such as probation service, services for ex-offenders and discharged prisoners, and correctional homes in the same group. It shows clearly that the government has adopted a remedial stance in delivering social work services for young people. Subvented social work services for young people have been further distorted by the post-colonial political environment and neoliberalism. Especially after the implementation of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS), social work managers can make use of the advantages of financial flexibility to hire more social workers, namely in non-subvented positions. They are particularly interested in consumer-driven and market-based social services that help expand the scale of the agencies. Hence, frontline practitioners are getting more reluctant to be involved in typical social work interventions, such as outreaching, casework counseling, and social work groups (Cheung, 2016).

This study reclaimed the professionality of youth work in Hong Kong and pinpointed the importance of trust in social work practice. Youth work is among the few social work settings that some of the service users can be related to social workers on a voluntarily basis. It provides a desirable platform for practitioners in expressing genuine
concerns to service users and exercising a person-centred and non-judgmental attitude. Such a favorable practice environment helps affirms a person’s individuality by appreciating and recognizing his/her own unique qualities. As can be seen in the findings of this study, trustworthiness in social work relationship was highly valued. Youth workers did not consider themselves as experts in dealing with young people’s problem. Rather, they positioned themselves as companions of service users. They insisted that it demanded a long-lasting engagement for any trustful relationship to be successfully established. It reminded us that the consideration of cost-effectiveness refrained social workers from connecting with service users in an authentic manner. With practice wisdom, highly experienced practitioners were able to manage the interplay of relationships and boundaries in a close and highly charged intersubjective encounter. Thus, both the youth work in Hong Kong and the function of youth workers have to be thoughtfully repositioned so as to respond to the changing needs of young people nowadays.

7.2.2. Relationship-Based Social Work Practice Reconsidered

Relationship is not only a prerequisite for good practice, but more importantly, a change agent in social work intervention (Ornstein & Ganzer, 2005; Tosone, 2004). It has always been a central theme in social work (O’Leary, Tsui & Ruch, 2013). How we perceive, understand, and make good use of relationship, shapes the way we practice social work. As Howe (1998) notes, “a relationship-based approach lies at the heart of good practice” (p. 45). The interest in relationship-based social work practice has grown over the years (Murphy, Duggan, & Joseph, 2013). For Graybeal (2007), “the
profession’s long-standing emphasis on the relationship between worker and client is at the heart of change” (p. 514). It is difficult for practitioners to deny that social work is relationship-based, i.e., relationship is central to good practice (Howe, 1998; Ruch, Turney, & Ward, 2010). By emphasizing the interconnection of social workers and service users (Tosone, 2004) and the process of co-constructing meaning (Ornstein & Ganzer, 2005), the relationship-based model discards the hierarchical “professional expert” approach and favors the establishment of a collaborative partnership through in-depth relationships and process-based interventions (Ruch, 2010).

At some points, for most of us, we seem to agree that social work cannot be made possible without having a good relationship, between workers and service users in particular. However, it has become more and more difficult for social workers to stand for the importance of relationship today, as social work has been evolving into an evidence-informed profession (Okpych & Yu, 2014). The importance of relationship in social work is well-acknowledged but seldom being evaluated (Turney, 2010). The relationship between social workers and service users is often understood as a starting point or foundation of the helping process. Practitioners generally see relationship as a tool for obtaining trust and respect from service users, or merely the first step before social work intervention begins. Although relationship is regarded as an important vehicle for establishing therapeutic alliance, practitioners do not usually consider the service-user–practitioner relationship change-inducing in itself. Instead of paying extra attention to understand what a good relationship should be, energy has been devoted to looking at what we can do after a relationship is established.
In this study, I was interested in examining how social workers are able to connect with young people through a trustful relationship. Human relationship is an art. The relationship-based approach sheds light on defining the artistry of practice (Schön, 1983) in social work. In the construct of art as experience, Dewey (1980) asserts that art can transform the relationship between an individual and the world. An artful practice “describes how practitioners use style, relationship, and metaphor to create an aesthetic experience for both clients and practitioners in the therapeutic process” (Siporin, 1988, p. 177). With aesthetic experiences, an individual is able to appreciate and value different aspects of the world in a new way. Social work involves the creation of beauty by a conscious and intentional craftsmanship (Siporin, 1988). Social workers combine this craftsmanship and their aesthetic experiences in the acceptance of and connection with their service users. It requires a controlled and individualized artistic skill which is “sensitivity to, appreciation for, and discernment of the distinctive good qualities of a material object, person, or experience” (Siporin, 1988, p. 179).

7.2.3. Engaging Young People with Trust

To the informants of this study, engagement was fundamental to working effectively in youth work settings. As long as an effective engagement cannot be established at the initial stage of a working relationship, further assessment and intervention cannot be made possible. Although working with involuntary clients (Calder 2008; Rooney 2009) is not new to social work, this study focused not only to the skills
and techniques that involuntary clients can be successfully engaged, but more importantly the root of human-to-human connections between workers and service users.

Establishing voluntary relationships with young people is a recurring theme in youth work. In working with young people, there is a covenant between workers and clients in working as partners “to heal hurts, to repair damage, to grow into responsibility, and to promote new ways of being” (Sercombe, 2010, p. 11). According to Sapin (2013), youth workers usually have a sense of humour and enjoy work with young people. However, they also take a strong stance on rules and authority and are less likely to collude in unacceptable behaviour. Nevertheless, Sapin (2013) also mentions that youth work is flexible in a sense that different styles of youth workers are available in suiting a diversity of young people. Jones and Pritchard (1980) assert that the style of the worker is the central mechanism affecting the quality of social work provided. Referring to Blacker (2010), youth workers need to think about who they are, what qualities they bring to their interactions and how their personality affects their relationships. This study suggested that youth workers should have a responsibility to look at themselves in order to understand why they can relate young people better than others, since relationships are central to practice.

This study did not focus on how social workers can turn relationship from involuntary to voluntary. Rather, it focused on how a voluntary and trustful relationship can be cultivated in the first place, no matter the service users are or are not identified as “they need help” prior to engagement. As Turney (2010) points out, “if the service user feels valued, understood and secure in their relationship with the social worker, it is more likely that they will feel able to grapple with the distressing and painful parts of their life”
Instead of recasting skills and techniques provided in social work textbooks that fostering practitioners to “build trust” with clients, this study explored practice wisdom, or the uncommon sense, of social workers in engaging with young people. It is suggested that social work was not and should not merely be instrumental. For Chenot (1998), “the centrality of the relationship in the clinical situation is also an important long-standing value in social work” (p. 307). Through the understanding of intersubjectivity, it referred to how the worker and client involve in codetermining things within their relationship.

A major obstacle in practicing relational social work is due to the absence of trust. Smith (2001) argues that trust is necessary to social work, but becoming less important than confidence in contemporary practice. As a “role-job”, especially in statutory settings, social work is defined by a specific set of skills with limited room for further interpretation or improvisation (Howe, 1998). Social workers are regarded as professionals who have confidence in dealing with clients’ difficulties by their expert knowledge. Clients assume that experienced social workers should possess the necessary skills that help solve their problems in a reliable and efficient manner. Yet, it is different from trust that allows an individual (i.e. both the service user and social worker) to open up oneself and share with the others. Smith (2001, p. 300) argues that,

“trust, as an essentially moral form of engagement, is necessary for social work practice. However, social work is not only moral in this sense but must be practised so as to be morally good. I am not referring here to governance by a code of ethics, which is largely a matter of confidence, but to practice which enhances trust (as a moral good) between social workers and service users.”
Through the lens of senior practitioners, this study concluded that trustworthiness was a key component of the successful engagement in a social work relationship. Yet, trustworthiness itself was not measurable. Such a specific state of interpersonal encounter could not be achieved through undergoing a set of designated procedures. A youth worker was able to gain trust from a young person even though nothing has been done in an explicit manner. Trust was not a belief in the competence of a social worker by the service user. Instead, it was a belief of others in a moral sense. Informants of this study revealed acceptance, companionship, and genuineness were the important qualities in the constitution of trust in social work relationship.

7.2.4. Towards a Refined Intervention Approach of Youth Work

Social work practice in developed states such as Hong Kong, a deficit model, which assumes the service users require remedial interventions, is adopted (Folgheraiter, 2007). The relationship-based approach that emphasizes partnership and mutuality receives less support than other therapeutic models that favor the ties of social work to clinical psychology. Psychoanalytical training are considered elitist (Goldstein, 1996) and a good many of social workers turn to psychoanalytic institutes for “a sense of professional identity and community” (Tosone, 2004, p. 476). As Murphy, Duggan, and Joseph (2013) critically point out, a relationship-based approach from a person-centered point of view is incompatible with modern statutory social work practice alongside the existing political and professional context. It is because social workers have been focusing too heavily on finding ready-made solutions to solve problems of service users.
while performing their statutory duties. Besides, a sophisticated theoretical framework that supports the use of relationship as a catalyst for change is lacking in social work literature (Ornstein & Ganzer, 2005).

Taking Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) as an example, the main purpose and objectives of ICYSCs are to support and develop children and youth to become happy, mature, responsible and contributing members of society. Referring to the Funding and Service Agreement provided by the funder (i.e. Social Welfare Department), ICYSCs should offer guidance and counselling services, supportive services for children and youth in disadvantaged circumstances, socialisation programmes, and social responsibility and competence enhancement programmes, through the flexible application of outreaching, centre-based service and school social work. Unlike clients in other social work settings such as family services, young people were not intentionally looking for social workers for help. They did not come to the youth centre with explicit presenting problems. Even though they were met by outreaching youth workers in the street, they did not consider themselves “needing someone’s help” in the first place.

As noted by an informant working in an ICYSC youth centre, most of the young people she met were not without facing any difficulties in lives. The youth centre did provide an informal but easily accessible channel for young people to come across with social workers without being labelled. She invited young people to take part in volunteer services and worked with them by means of social work groups. In fact, she took care of members of the groups on individual basis out of the formal contact hours in the group. To some of her colleagues, including her supervisor, what a youth worker in ICYSC
should do was to fulfill the requirement of the *Funding and Service Agreement* by helping young people through offering typical social work services such as casework or groupwork. However, this informant, as well as many of the others, considered working with young people “formally” (for example, providing typical casework service in a counselling room) was only the “side dish” being served on the table. Only by getting along with them “informally” by means of having dinner, playing ball games, going to karaoke, hiking, and even taking a bus together, could young people be successfully engaged and connected.

Relationship-based models of practice involve the use of in-depth relationships and process-based intervention (Ruch, 2012). Social workers have to be especially reflective of the presence of transference and counter-transference while engaging collaboratively in partnership with service users. In such a close and highly charged relationship, social work involves the conscious use of self in the professional context (Ward, 2010). By regularly challenging oneself “how do I relate interpersonally with the service user”, “how should I manage the relationship”, and “how much of myself should I disclose”, a practitioner will be able to visualize his/her own self in relation to others. It is referred to as a heuristic process of asking oneself question (Mandell, 2007) by the reflective social worker who supports the intentional use of self in relationship-based practice. Academics and practitioners in the field have been trying very hard to justify the effectiveness of using a good number of different “formal” counselling approaches or therapeutic skills to help solve client’s problem. Nonetheless, as informants of this study put forth, young people had yet been truly connected to us unless they were given the opportunities to get in touch with the authentic selves of social workers.
7.2.5. Implications for Social Work Education and Further Research

Social work education in Hong Kong has been focused, somewhat too heavily, on equipping prospective social workers with all the necessary practical skills and techniques that help inducing service users’ change through different kinds of intervention. Unsurprisingly, with the influences of new managerialism and the EBP movement in social work, academics and practitioners are increasingly interested in looking for handy and ready-made solutions to human problems. Some of them tend to believe that behaviour, inclination, and even the affective state of service users can all be scientifically analyzed, interpreted, and predicted. In that sense, it is of a “professional” social worker’s responsibility to ensure that service users’ trouble can be resolved in an efficient manner. In a similar vein, service users tend to perceive their role as a customer. They come to see social workers and expect to acquire a quick answer in response to their personal challenges and complications in lives.

Findings of this study, however, suggested that the relationship between social workers and service users was at the heart of social work practice. The development of such a change-inducing agent, i.e. a trustful relationship, in person-centred care was considered more important than explicit intervention skills and techniques. Yet, it can never be made possible unless the social worker possess a solid self-concept and self-understanding. Nor can it be done without having a connection with genuineness. Education and training in social work should thus focus on preparing practitioners to get in touch with their own selves in the first place. After that, an ongoing self-contemplation and self-cultivation of social worker was crucial to the development of practice wisdom.
The relational orientation in practice is not limited to youth work. This study, being of an exploratory and interpretive nature, shed light on how a good relationship between youth workers and young people could bring about beneficial outcomes in practice. It raised a number of opportunities for future research, in terms of theory development and concept validation. More research in other service settings in social work will be necessary. I suggested that further research could be extended to practice wisdom in social work relationship with other groups of service users, for example, elderly people. Service users could be invited as informants as well. Academic discussions and/or further debates on the conceptions of practice wisdom, aesthetics, and artistry of practice should also be encouraged in the area of social work.

7.3. Reflections

7.3.1. Personal

At the time of conducting this study, I was employed as a social work practitioner in a government-funded social service agency and I had already involved in frontline and administrative positions in the children, youth, and community setting for thirteen years. I was glad that I had decided to choose this interesting topic for my doctoral thesis, in spite of the fact that it was more difficult than I could have imagined at the very beginning. With this valuable opportunity, I was lucky enough to have a lot of insightful and thought-provoking discussions with many passionate practitioners in the field. They did not only help me in answering the research questions, but more importantly, also support me in offering social work services for young people and other service users with a more
sophisticated manner in future. I was particularly interested in studying the nature of relationship between social workers and service users because I was convinced that it was the thing that made social work special. This study helped me with consolidating my own reflections and wisdom in my experiences of working with young people. Notwithstanding practice wisdom in social work was still an underdeveloped concept, I agreed that it was of my professional obligation to set this right.

7.3.2. Professional

Social worker, as a professional, refers to someone that a service user can rely on. For being a technocrat with the expertise in tackling human problems, the social worker is unlikely to engage with the service user successfully unless he/she can put one’s mind at rest with the help of confidence. In order to achieve this purpose, the social worker should identify a list of pre-determined solutions and apply them to practice in a skilled way. Yet, for being a moral actor and an empathic sharer in service user’s suffering, the therapeutic alliance cannot be established in the absence of trust. As trust is affective in nature, getting along with service users genuinely in a longer period of time could help foster such a change-inducing climate. Although confidence and trust are not mutually exclusive, this study stressed more on the importance of trust in social work relationship and suggested that practitioners should not underestimate the healing power of a truly trustful encounter. Trust is, in fact, not a difficult concept to apprehend. In thinking about how we trust another individual in our normal lives, we are able to associate the reasons why we are and are not trusted by our service users.
7.3.3. Philosophical

This study concluded that practice wisdom in social work practice was tacit, intuitive, and embodied. It was not some type of codifiable professional knowledge and was also not merely practice experiences. Rather, it was value-driven, context-specific, and highly personalized understanding of the social environment. Social workers could approach closer to their authentic selves through a transcendental journey of cultivating practice wisdom. Subsequently, service users’ internal sources of healing strength could be induced by the self-actualized practitioners. Social workers could acquire the practice wisdom to apprehend the social beauty in the client-environment context. The worker-client alliance was considered at the heart of humanistic social work practice. It stipulated that real changes cannot be made without successful engagement in the intersubjective encounter between I and Thou (i.e., worker and client).

7.4. The Way Ahead: A Revival of Relationship-Based Social Work

In light of the general trend to globalize, harmonize, and standardize social work knowledge, there is an urgent call for a more solid base of social work knowledge to be established (Gray & Schubert, 2013). Nonetheless, one should also be aware of turning into professional bureaucracy because authorized experts would be expected to solve problems in a logical and consistent way (Lam, 2000). Despite the increasing attention being paid to adopting the person-centred, relationship-based approach to contemporary social work, Murphy, Duggan, and Joseph (2013) admonish that there is a potential limitation to contemporary social workers being truly person-centred. Particularly with
respect to the modern statutory social work setting, the person-centred attitudinal stance of human service practitioners is valued less than the significance of managerialism, cost-effectiveness, risk management, consumerism, etc. Social work has long been a shaky profession. It is not surprising to notice that the historical estrangement (Goldstein, 1992) between hard empirical evidences and soft knowledge derived from practice experiences persists. Hudson (1997) advises readers to consult “practitioners who are acknowledged as being ‘good’ at what they do.” She asserts that practice wisdom should be conceptualized, codified and incorporated into theory. However, the practice wisdom mentioned by Hudson is somewhat closer to the meaning of best practice. With the emergence of knowledge management in social work, good practice of professionals is increasingly determined according to performance, effectiveness, quality, protocol, and standard to enhance organizational competitiveness as a whole. Expert judgement based on empirical evidence, success factor research, and benchmarking are the three types of approaches for identifying good or best practices in commercial, non-profit, and even medical settings. Organizations “strive to implement as many ‘good’ if not ‘best’ practices as possible in order to maximize their competitive advantage” (Wellstein & Kieser, 2011, p. 684). Practice wisdom is regarded by Kessler, Gira and Poertner (2005) as the most commonly accepted definition of best practice. Hence, they advocate the importance of codifying practice wisdom to manuals and curriculum by asking experienced practitioners to identify “what they have found to be effective in their practice” (Kessler, Gira & Poertner, 2005, p. 245). This understanding seems to agree that practice wisdom refers to good examples, good habits, good customs and/or good lessons learnt that are somehow codifiable, transformable and manageable. However, as
can be seen in the findings of this study, this kind of understanding is not useful enough for describing the true wisdom in social work and can even limit certain important aspects of real practice.

Social work is indeed commonsensical in an uncommon way; it should be an uncommon sense of “the kind of natural orientation with which the good social worker is equipped” (Gammack, 1982, p. 14). The “good” being used here is different from the above as it possesses moral meanings. Central to practice wisdom in social work is a collection of morally committed doings, sayings, and relating (Kemmis, 2012; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012) that translate empirical knowledge, prior experiences, and other forms of knowing (Klein & Bloom, 1995) into embodied profession reflection. Social workers are able to know things morally rather than by pure observation and objective knowing (Whan, 1986). Professionally, wise judgement involves a morally good sense of purposeful, appropriate, and feasible responses. Wise practitioners should be well-equipped with the abilities to develop on-the-spot mini-hypotheses (Klein and Bloom, 1995) and make ethical decisions spontaneously (Goldberg, 2005). As told by Thomas Aquinas, the father of Thomism, “nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses” (Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu). Referring to Kant (1790/2007), common sense judgement is the faculty responsible for discerning beauty, i.e., aesthetic judgements. Practice wisdom in social work is not the wisdom of analytic experience, but rather it is the wisdom or a quality characterized by courtesy, kindness, consideration, compassion and benevolence. It is uniquely uncommonsensical. It refers to a particular bodily, practical, and moral sense that cannot only be known but must be felt by the practitioner. Embodiment is the core component in social work practice wisdom. Practice
wisdom in social work refers to the embodied phronesis of a reflective social worker. It lies deeply in the heart but not in the mind. In this study, the articulation of practice wisdom as an uncommon sense in the intersubjective encounter between worker and client or as a morally relevant quality in the artistry of social work supports the revival of relationship-based practice with person-centered orientation.
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225


致：__________________

誠邀參與有關「青年工作實務智慧」之研究

本人是香港理工大學應用社會科學系學生，目前在林昭寰老師的指導下進行一項有關青年工作實務智慧 (practice wisdom) 之博士論文研究。期望藉由閣下的參與，探討資深青年工作者之實務智慧如何體現於社會工作關係之中。與此同時，盼能透過此研究，對社會工作的「關係為本取向」（relationship-based orientation）有更進一步之認識。是次研究主要採用深度訪談之形式，期望進行不多於三次之個別面談，每次約九十分鐘。建議之訪談內容如下：

(1) 請分享一至兩個關於你和青年服務對象的故事
(2) 青年工作者如何與青年人建立關係？
(3) 於青年工作中，如何界定具有社會工作意義的關係？
(4) 一段成功的關係通常具備哪些特質？
(5) 青年工作者如何透過關係達致社會工作的目的？
(6) 青年工作具有什麼獨特之處？青年工作者需要具備何等的實務智慧？
(7) 是什麼原因驅使你致力投身青年工作？
(8) 有人認為社會工作是一門藝術，你有多大程度同意或不同意此論述？
(9) 訪問青年服務對象（如適用）

基於上述之研究目的，現誠摯邀請閣下與青年服務對象（如適用）共同參與此研究。訪談過程將全程錄音，而所有錄音檔案，將陸為逐字稿以作內容分析之用。所有的錄音檔案以及相關資料僅供研究用途，並會在研究報告完成後銷毀。論文撰寫的過程中，所有可能被辨認出身分的個人資料亦將以匿名的方式呈現，從而保障閣下之個人私隱。

閣下的參與對於本研究及提升青年工作專業性具有莫大意義，如有任何疑問，歡迎與本人聯絡。

順祝

工作愉快，身體健康！

二零一五年十一月一日
APPENDIX 1 (English version)

1 November 2015

Dear (name of the informant),

Re: Invitation to participate in the research titled: “A study of practice wisdom in social work relationship with young people”

I am conducting interviews as part of a doctoral research to examine the practice wisdom in youth work. This study is supervised by Dr. Chiu-wan Lam of the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. As a senior practitioner, you are in an ideal position to give me firsthand insights on how practice wisdom is embodied and manifested in social work relationship from your valuable experiences. Meanwhile, I am also interested in exploring the relationship-based orientation in social work through this study. In-depth interviews will be conducted and each takes around 90 minutes. Some of the suggested interview questions are as follows:

1. Please share one or two stories about you and your service users.
2. How do youth workers build relationships with young people?
3. In youth work, how do you define a successful relationship with young people?
4. What are the important ingredients in a successful relationship?
5. How do youth workers achieve the goal of social work through relationships?
6. What makes youth work unique? What do you think the practice wisdom of youth worker is?
7. What makes you committed to youth work?
8. Some people consider social work as an art, to what extent you agree or disagree with this contention?
9. Interview with service users (if applicable)

Referring to the abovementioned research purposes, you and your service users (if applicable) are cordially invited to participate in this study. The interview process will be recorded for further analysis. All recordings will be used for research purposes only and will be destroyed after the completion of the study. Personal information will be presented anonymously in order to protect the privacy of informants.

Your participation will be a valuable addition to this study and the findings could promote the professionality of youth work. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Best Regards,
Johnson Chun-Sing Cheung
APPENDIX 2

Consent Form for the use of recorded material

I ______________________ (Name)

Address: ______________________________________________________________

Give my consent to Cheung Chun-Sing Johnson to transcribe, and use the data which has been recorded by him. The researcher has explained to me that the transcribed material will be used in his doctoral dissertation. And I will be given a copy of the results when the research is completed.

Signature: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________