Greening social work education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Introduction

Temperature and sea level rises, extreme weather events, food and water insecurity and loss of biodiversity are gaining notoriety in popular and social media, with the evidence of their presence all around us. Associated impacts can be seen not only in the physical worlds with droughts, rising seas, wild weather and extreme temperatures, but also in the social and economic world. Secondary impacts (Butler and Harley, 2010) on food and water security and human health (Adlong and Dietsch, 2014; McMichael, 2013; Franchini and Mannucci, 2015; Friel, 2010) will affect not only governments, corporate profits and the economy but also job security for communities across the world. The changing climate will bring with it both risks and opportunities. It seems that the threat of disaster as a consequence of climate change offers an opportunity to develop a socially just, culturally respectful and sustainable world with indigenous wisdom paving the way. According to Teixeira and Krings:

The communities most affected by environmental injustices are often the same communities where social workers are entrenched in service provision at the individual, family, and community level.

(2015: 1)

People with limited financial resources are often victims of discrimination, inequity and potentially most vulnerable to the impacts of an unsustainable world. These groups often have established relationships with both statutory and non-government agencies and particularly social workers (Drolet and Sampson, 2014; Gray and Coates, 2015; Grise-Owens, Miller, and Owens, 2014). They will also be further disadvantaged by the impacts of climate change (Lawler, 2011; New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine, 2013). Paradoxically, some of these groups have incredible resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated in a range of creative solutions, movements and communities across the globe that offer alternative approaches to living outside of the mainstream (Tigger-Ross et al., 2015). Social work, being the only profession with social justice embedded in its definition needs to creatively offer support in building resilience and adaptation to impacts of climate change and globalisation (Appleby et al., 2015).
This chapter presents a simple yet relevant approach of introducing a Sustainable Social Work workshop to social work programmes and as professional development opportunities offered for practicing social workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The workshop introduces current knowledge related to climate change and sustainability focusing on its relevance to social and community work while preparing social workers for action in being part of the solution to the environmental challenges. Aiming at increasing awareness on the issues and relevance of impacts of climate change to social work while supporting students through their own journey of acceptance, by harnessing the skills they already have, building resilience in communities and understanding how this work aligns not only with ethics of social work but also social and environmental justice.

**Social justice and green social work**

In order to be able to think globally and act locally, social workers need to understand the risks and relevance that climate change has to their clients (and themselves) and develop strategies to address these through policy development and effective community and social work practices (Dominelli, 2014; Hoffand and Polack, 1993; Lombard, 2015). There is a clear connection between social and environmental justice (Nesmith and Smyth, 2015; The Earth Charter Initiative, 2009). As social workers are fundamentally concerned with social justice, the extension of the well-known practice of understanding the person within their context can be extended to encompass not only social but also environmental justice (Besthorn, 1997; Weick, 1981; Zapf, 2009).

Environmental justice emerged from the US in the early 1980s in response to environmental destruction and concern that ‘toxic facilities were disproportionately located in low-income communities of colour’ (Philip and Reisch, 2015: 476). It emerged due to concern with the quality of the environment in which people live and the effect it was and is having on local people’s well-being. Social justice can essentially be explained as a concern with the equality of opportunity for people to fulfil their potential (Friesen, 2007). This concept fits well and can include not only social opportunity but also environmental opportunities available to people. Green social work (Dominelli, 2012) has argued that environmental justice now comprises an essential component of social justice.

The person-in-environment perspective has been traditionally only concerned with the environment from the perspective of how it functions to service the social needs of human beings. It does not take into consideration more fundamental rights of the planet and all of its inhabitants, as does green social work. Social work scholars are arguing that to be truly socially just we need to take on a broader and deeper ecological perspective (Besthorn and Canda, 2002; Besthorn, 2014; Coates, 2003; Dominelli, 2012) by being concerned with the well-being of all flora and fauna on the planet and their rights to live well and safe from destruction and abuse. This idea was developed by scientist James Lovelock and his Gaia theory (Lovelock, 2006), in which he acknowledged that humans are part of and not adjunct to the planet and its ecology, acknowledging that Earth is a living ecosystem. Similar ideas are the foundation to many indigenous beliefs (Roberts et al., 1995). Of particular relevance to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context is the role of holistic thinking in Māori culture, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

From a macro-ecological practice perspective, it can be argued that all who live on the planet (both human and non-human) have a right to co-exist and flourish. However, the responsibility for this destruction lies squarely at the feet of humans (IPCC, 2007). Humans are thus obliged to take action. ‘Green social work’ (Dominelli, 2012) combines these two perspectives:
social workers’ macro-practice and ecological thinking – to take action in a local space while acknowledging the integrated interaction between the global and the local. Well-educated social workers have the ability to use their skills in advocacy, influence on policy and challenge power dynamics to support those being affected by environmental degradation and injustices. The ability of social workers to bring people together across disciplines, cultures and geographical locations are important features in green social work practice (Dominelli, 2012). Community development as an essential aspect of social work will have its merited place in promotion of a sustainable ‘globalised’ world.

**Aotearoa/New Zealand social work education**

Aotearoa/New Zealand prides itself on being a bicultural country founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi a document that promises partnership and sovereignty to both Māori and non-Māori. In this country, the primary competence of becoming a social worker includes being able to practise social work with Māori (Social Work Registration Board, 2014). This requires the understanding and appreciation of a worldview based on the values summarised in Table 44.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description (as Māori language is a contextual language this side of the table only gives the general idea about the meaning of the term; true meaning is dependent of the context in which it is used)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whanaungtanga</td>
<td>A sense of belonging, reciprocal relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manakitanga</td>
<td>It is a measurement of people’s ability to extend aroha (love in its widest sense), hospitality, generosity, welcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotahitanga</td>
<td>Oneness, unity, solidarity, collective action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangatiratanga</td>
<td>Self-governance, chieftainship, right to exercise authority, ownership, leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohiotanga</td>
<td>Sharing of information, knowledge, knowing, understanding, comprehension, intelligence, awareness, insight, perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maramatanga</td>
<td>Understanding, enlightenment, insight, understanding, light, meaning, significance, brainwave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuakana/Teina</td>
<td>Older/younger relationships reciprocity: older looking out for younger and younger looking out for older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitiakitanga</td>
<td>Guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship, protection of natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>Genealogy in a widest possible sense that extends blood lineage Connections, to be in contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wairuatanga</td>
<td>Spiritual well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikanga</td>
<td>Correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method, manner, rule, way – the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakari</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atuatanga</td>
<td>Paying respect to divinity Respecting diversity of beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauri</td>
<td>Life principle, vital essence, special nature, a material symbol of a life principle, source of emotions – the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem or social group in which this essence is located</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Māori worldview is deeply connected to sustainability and assumes people as guardians who are responsible to their ancestors and descendants, and must protect and live in harmony with nature (Kawharu, 2000). There are plenty of examples around earth stewardship and the practice of kaitiakitanga interwoven in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s indigenous history (Harmsworth, 2002). Unfortunately, despite this rich bicultural heritage, Non-Māori New Zealand social work has not been quick to answer the call to action made by environmental and climate scientists. The connections between social work sustainability and climate change have not been adequately addressed in social work education in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In response to the growing environmental concerns facing this and future generations, the School of Social Work at Massey University supported the development of a workshop addressing the relevance of sustainability and climate change looking at the risks and the opportunities the current environmental predicament brings. Concepts of sustainability, environmental justice and climate change were introduced into the field education training in 2013 and are increasingly offering fieldwork placements in community development settings to widen the skills and understanding of the importance of community in addressing issues related to climate change to encourage sustainable practice in social work. The aim is to provoke and engage to educate and enlighten students and social work practitioners by developing knowledge, attitudes and skills that will mobilise them into action. Following a comprehensive overview of the risks and opportunities felt by the impacts of climate change and the contribution social work can make, the workshop was developed for the teaching curriculum in the field education programme and later extended into a PhD action research project.

A place in the curriculum

We have chosen to add in sustainability and climate change into the field education curriculum under the learning goal of social justice due to the parallels with environmental justice. This introduction was led by the first author having an interest in environmental social work, which from the literature, seems to be common way of introducing environmental issues into the social work curriculum (Mary, 2008; Nesmith and Smyth, 2015). The structure of the teaching prior to placement encourages students to start developing their own practice which is informed by a range of perspectives, theories including ecological systems, radical, strengths-based, green social work and a range of postmodern and indigenous models.

Green social work is taught in the field education programme when preparing students for placement in the final years of BSW and MASW programmes within the context of the wider social work curriculum, where other core social work knowledge, values and skills have previously been covered. Studies of the environment can be interpreted as an area of ‘macro-practice’ in social work (Reisch, 2016).

Workshop development, content and the process of continuous improvement

The workshop has been running as part of the field education programme since 2013. To date, 15 workshops have been delivered to 293 students 31 were social work practitioners in the field as delivered as professional development opportunity. As part of a PhD research project a further six workshops with 66 participants was also delivered totalling 359 participants (at time of writing). The workshop was developed via an action research process using transformative learning theory to inform and improve the design using Mezirow’s journey
of transformation (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Participants are taken on a three-hour experiential journey, starting with the facts including distressing information about the precarious future of humanity, though a process of discussion and activities leading them to solutions and finally action (Harre, 2012).

**Workshop content**

The three-hour workshop is in two sections. The first section starts by introducing the science and facts around the issue of climate change and the current and predicted impacts on the physical environment and human well-being. This is interspersed with exercises to give participants time to talk, reflect and draw conclusions for their personal and professional life. The aim of this section of the workshop is to encourage participants to see the connections between the environment and human activity (especially their own activity) and understand that the science around anthropogenic climate change is now clear. This section concludes with a video clip that brings intended learning points together.

After a break, the second section looks at sustainable solutions with the aim of giving participants hope and tools to take action. The definition of sustainability is discussed and participants get involved in an exercise focusing on a basic life cycle assessment (Strachan, 2008) to help them bring items and resources they use in everyday life into the context of carbon emissions. Current literature is presented to support the importance of environmental justice and social work, drawing links with social justice goals and those of the third generation rights in the international definition of social work jointly agreed by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (IFSW, 2014). These issues are discussed further in the context of the Global Agenda for Social Work which was originally scoped by IASSW and IFSW, but is now held jointly owned by IASSW, IFSW and ICSW (International Council on Social Welfare) (IFSW, 2012). Some examples from practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas are offered as showcasing a range of ways how green social work can be put into practice.

The workshop concludes by inviting the participants to draw a picture of their sustainable future followed by a *Traffic Light Exercise* where they are asked to circle in green, orange and red around the things they think are:

- easy to do (green);
- possible, but will require some effort (orange); and
- possible, but will require a lot of work or transformation on many levels (red).

This concluding exercise was chosen for several reasons. It includes:

- drawing which utilises a creative part of the brain;
- allows the participants to have creative, solution-focused conversations with peers around their sustainable future;
- allows them to see the future in a positive way;
- allows them to see where they may be able to take action; and
- is the final part of the session, so they can leave with short- and long-term action plans.

The feedback from this exercise is very positive with participants reporting leaving with a feeling of hope and inspired to take action.
Workshop evaluations

Evaluations were conducted after each workshop and used to inform the design and changes for the following workshop which is the part of the action–reflection approach to the workshop development. One of the observations over this time has been the acceptance of climate change as a reality by participants. Back in 2013, students were still debating about whether climate change was real, many thinking that impacts would not be evident this century. Since the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Reports Four and Five were released, the findings indicate that these issues are able to be resolved (IPCC, 2007, 2014b). Social and popular media appear to have taken on board that climate change impacts are real and that these are gradually becoming more widely understood. Therefore, the workshop no longer lists climate change impacts but participants are asked to chart impacts (in groups) according to their understanding of it locally. While not always exact, this engages participants better and builds on filling the gaps in knowledge in order to undertake an informed action. It seems that students are getting this information through social media as environmental issues in their social work education have not been explicitly discussed until they participate in this workshop.

As the debate has now moved towards how the impacts will be felt, students are understandably concerned with much of the current evidence suggesting that their generation will bear the brunt of climate change impacts. They are especially interested in consequences for Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as having an interest in global perspectives. Their views are expressed in Table 44.2.

A major theme in the early feedback was that participants wanted to know what to do with the information they had learnt, what could they do to make a difference to the environmental crisis? How would it apply in actual social work practice? As the workshop has been continuously developed over years on the basis of feedback and rapid changes in the environment, the focus has shifted from information sharing to social action relevant to social and community work considering current circumstances.

The sustainability check as a tool for practice

Social work has a range of fields of practice and therefore it would not be useful to prescribe particular interventions for each context. It is not the role of social work to prescribe interventions for clients and communities but to highlight issues by asking questions and inviting people to find solutions for themselves. This approach lies at the heart of green social work (Dominelli, 2012). Transformative learning theory suggests that if the client/service user (or in this case workshop participant) comes up with their own solutions, they are more likely to be successful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation data:</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants felt workshop content was relevant to social work</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>84.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants said they intended to change their behaviour as a result of</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attending the workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants said they would like to hear more about climate change and</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants said they would like to learn more about how climate change and</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sustainability is applied in practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants in student workshops 2013 to 2016 = 235</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Green social work education in Aotearoa

(Taylor, 1998). The same style of intervention can be used here with the social work role being to facilitate transformative reflection into action.

The sustainability check was developed from a need to have a tool that can be used across all areas of practice that would invite participants to ask questions about their own practice. A simple exercise in the workshop taken from Strachan (2008) teaches participants about their connection to environmental sustainability using a basic life cycle assessment (Dresner, 2008). The exercise (used in the workshop) asked participants (in small groups) to take any item and ask the following questions:

1. What is it made of?
2. Where has it come from?
3. Who made it?
4. What need does it fulfil?
5. Is it necessary?
6. What will happen to it in the future? (Strachan, 2008: 2)

This encourages the participants to reflect on the sustainability of the resources they are using, how they are connected to carbon emissions, themselves and the earth. As Strachan claims:

This approach enables learners to discover an understanding of systems thinking for themselves and this can be reinforced if they are given the opportunity to apply that understanding to a context with which they are familiar. In so doing they can become more at ease with the inter-connected nature of the world and less overwhelmed with its complexity. (2008: 2)

Workshop participants are encouraged to use the sustainability check as a tool in their social work practice in the same way they use the code of ethics, anti-oppressive or bicultural practice, as a filter when making practice decisions (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2013). By using the sustainability check within their practice participants assess how sustainable they are being and are encouraged to be more mindful about the resources they are choosing to use, this does not relate to objects only, but to processes and interventions as well.

This exercise can modify questions to address social work processes instead of just products, engendering critical reflection and encouraging meaningful actions. These questions are:

1. What is the core purpose of this intervention?
2. Where has it come from and is it culturally appropriate?
3. Who created it?
4. What need does it fulfil?
5. Is it necessary?
6. What will happen to my clients/service users, their families and communities if we follow through with it?

This simple, yet deep exercise can also enable social workers to critically reflect on unsustainable assessment processes, endless form filling, adoption of tools imported but not contextualised within a local context and lack of action to address causes of poverty and physical and mental health within the community. It can also promote the use of current research and indigenous wisdom to address chronic community problems instead of resorting to short-term 'band aid' interventions.
How to awaken the sense for social and environmental justice in social work students

From the years of teaching green social work, we have learnt that the impacts of climate change are issues of concern for many social workers. Its relevance to the context of social work practice, however, is something new. For educators wanting to teach environmental social work, the reflections and learning from our experience so far would be, to allow plenty of time for discussion during teaching. Once given the opportunity to reflect on the practicalities of climate change, particularly the health social and economic impacts, the relevance to the social world and the clients of social work, becomes apparent.

The intention of the workshops is to educate and evoke awareness of environmental justice enabling participants to take action. For this to happen, some form of transformation has to take place therefore, transformational learning theory was used to design and inform the workshop process. Mezirow’s 10 stages of transformation (Cranton, 2006) were used to chart people’s transformation at all the stages, concluding with what Mezirow (1991) describes a ‘perspective transformation’ (Mezirow, 1991: 145), where new learning leads to a change in perspective through critical reflection. The transformation happens in the reflection undertaken by the participants themselves. As with all transformative learning, once the person makes the connections for themselves, they are more likely to be compelled to take action. In this case, participants develop the connection between the use of resources, the current political system, their place in a consumer society and their power to have an impact by the choices they make. This may mobilise them to transform the way they live within their community and move towards more liveable, more engaging and more proactive participants. Simply informing them of this does not have the same impact on their willingness to take action.

Contrary to perceptions, teachers do not need to know lots of climate science to teach this subject. To know that climate change is anthropogenic (and have data to justify it) is enough in our experience. Social workers have not been too interested in the scientific details, there is plenty available online if people want further reading on the topic (Hansen et al., 2008; IPCC, 2014a). There is now also an array of social work literature on the subject so a few articles including: Zapf (2009), Dominelli (2012, 2014), Peeters (2012), Jeffery (2014), Gray and Coates (2015), Teixeira and Krings (2015) and many more can be found in the references to this chapter. It seems that critical reflexivity (so essential for social work practice) is a most important skill needed. Once the initial concepts and connections have been made between climate, use of resources, and physical, social, health and economic impacts, and when participants realise that they have the agency to make a meaningful contribution to create resilient and sustainable communities, it is more likely that they will spring into action.

The literature supports an integrated rather than a ‘bolt on’ approach as identified by green social work (Dominelli, 2012) and others (Mann, 2011; Boetto and Bell, 2015; Gray and Coates, 2015), and thus can be a critique of this style of bespoke teaching. However, given that we are only in the developing awareness stage, the ‘bolt on’ approach seemed to be a good place to start. Integration will become the long-term aim of teaching sustainability and green social work throughout the curriculum content.

Questions and future developments

Main questions that have arisen while developing this curriculum innovation have been:

• How to integrate indigenous knowledge without exploiting the indigenous community?
• How to create a sustainable world within an intrinsically unsustainable neoliberal system which owes its existence on widening the gap between rich and poor people?
• Is it ethical to educate students to be agents of social change when the majority of them end up in jobs where they are asked and required to be agents of social control?
• How can disempowered communities contribute to the creation of a more sustainable and just world when they are struggling for mere survival?
• How to educate communities to grow their own food especially in neighbourhoods where this is perceived as another sign of poverty where fast food and packaged food are considered a symbol of wealth?
• How to redevelop trust when trust has been broken, when social workers have been perceived as an extended arm of an unsustainable and oppressive system?

The work at Massey University School of Social Work continues with a deeper look into the value of green social work education. The author team are supporting an in-depth action research PhD study, critically evaluating what has been done and attempting to find out how social workers can develop tools and strategies to realise social and environmental justice within the neoliberal context and contribute to the development of an environmentally just system. Indigenous knowledge and the power of the oppressed can be allies in building a respectful and appreciative world where social and community workers truly support individuals, groups and communities to realise their full potential. It is our hope that by analysing in-depth evaluations of workshops, conducting interviews with interested social workers and capturing transformations that happen during the process will help us highlight both the risks and opportunities for the future social work generations in Aotearoa/New Zealand and beyond.

References
Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers. (2013). The code of ethics of ANZASW.


