Greening social work education
Transforming the curriculum in pursuit of eco-social justice

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Introduction

Despite stubborn resistance from some quarters, the public is beginning to recognise that anthropogenic climate changes pose enormous challenges for humanity and the planet. While climate change is certainly not the only environmental issue facing the earth today, it has emerged as the most urgent and pressing of issues, both overarching and clearly linked with a long list of environmental concerns including deforestation, biodiversity loss, food and water security, pollution and waste. There is now clear evidence of the ways in which anthropogenic climate change is already impacting upon both natural systems and human well-being (IPCC, 2014; CSIRO, 2015; Wahlquist, 2017). It is becoming increasingly obvious that these negative impacts are not being distributed equally, but fall disproportionately on those already in situations of disadvantage (Dominelli, 2012; Wade, 2015; Worland, 2016).

As social work begins the process of expanding its professional worldview to encompass more fully a concern with the natural environment, and recognition that human well-being is fundamentally and inextricably linked with environmental well-being, the role of social work education is brought into focus. It has been argued that the shift required by the profession if it is to truly embrace a green or eco-social paradigm will be dramatic and transformative (Besthorn, 2012; Dominelli, 2012; Peeters, 2012). While such change will require shifts in all aspects of the profession, a fundamental rethinking of the nature and purpose of social work education will be crucial to this transformation.

This chapter discusses the increasingly visible movement to expand social work’s connection to the environment and the calls for greater professional engagement in this area. Recent literature exploring this issue within social work education is presented and the role that social work education might play in promoting engagement with environmental issues and in facilitating a wider professional transformation is then discussed before exploring some of the pedagogical approaches and curriculum challenges that should be considered as part of this process. Ideas are then presented outlining what a truly transformed eco-social curriculum might look like.
Greening social work education

A note about terminology

A number of authors have noted the challenges of language when attempting to describe a social work approach which is concerned with the natural environment and its relationship to human well-being (see for example, Gray and Coates, 2015; Melekis and Woodhouse, 2015; Boetto, 2016). The terms ‘green’, ‘environmental’, ‘ecological’ and ‘eco-social’ have all been suggested and all have limitations associated with them. In reflecting upon these limitations, this chapter uses the phrase ‘eco-social’ to describe an approach to social work which encompasses an understanding of ecology (i.e. recognition of the interconnected nature of all living and non-living elements) and society, and which sees human well-being as inherently and inextricably linked to a healthy and sustainable natural environment, and thus giving it green credentials.

Social work, social work education and the environment

A relatively small, but rapidly growing, body of academic writing addressing issues of social work and the natural environment now exists. A number of authors have usefully reviewed this body of existing literature (McKinnon, 2008; Besthorn, 2012; Narhi and Matthies, 2016), highlighting a consistent call for the profession to expand its concerns beyond a narrow social orientation to include recognition of the importance of the non-human environment, both inherently and in relation to human well-being. Gray et al. (2013) provide a particularly valuable overview of this material, identifying key authors and central themes emerging from the literature. Ramsay and Boddy (2016) also offer an interesting concept analysis of environmental social work, examining published work in this field to identify its attributes and characteristics and to develop a definition of this approach to practice. Given the coverage of this body of work elsewhere, this chapter will not reproduce such a general review here.

However, a number of writers have also advanced the argument that social work education, as a critical component of the wider profession, needs to better integrate the natural environment into its core concerns (Jones, 2010; Dominelli, 2012, 2013, 2014; Gray and Coates, 2015). Hayward et al. (2013) noted that despite research indicating social work students and practitioners were indeed interested in issues of the environment, their actual experience of education and practice still reflected an individualistic or humanistic perspective. This orientation was confirmed by Harris and Boddy (2017: 10) who conducted a content analysis of Australian social work courses and concluded that ‘there is an overall lack of engagement in Australian social work education with content related to the natural environment’.

For some authors, the inclusion of ‘environmental justice’ as a key professional consideration has framed their ideas about revising social work education (Dominelli, 2012; Beltran, Hacker and Begun, 2016). Philip and Reisch (2015), for example, review the environmental justice movement in the United States (US) and argue that integrating a global perspective on environmental justice into social work education would help to expand the profession’s currently narrow understanding of ‘person-in-environment’. Teixeira and Krings (2015) present a framework designed to guide the integration of environmental justice principles into traditional social work education, bringing together insights from the global standards for social work education and environmental justice perspectives. There is evidence that this greater inclusion of environmental justice concerns in social work education would be welcomed by the profession (Miller and Hayward, 2014). Nesmith and Smyth (2015: 497) surveyed American social workers and found that participants ‘believed that addressing environmental injustices was relevant to the profession,
that they received inadequate training on it, and that it should be integrated more intentionally into social work education’.

A number of examples have also now been reported of practical attempts to integrate environmental concerns into professional education (e.g. Schmitz, Matyok, James and Sloan, 2013; Dominelli, 2013; Jones, 2014). Drolet et al. (2015), for instance, present an account of the development of a new course on social work and sustainable social development, arising from the authors’ recognition of the need to play a role in responding to environmental as well as social and economic crises. Kaiser, Himmelheber, Miller and Hayward (2015) describe using the specific issue of food justice as a lens through which social work students can learn about environmental issues and their relevance. Focusing on this issue allows the authors to make connections with a number of different fields of practice, methods and practice levels throughout the social work programme. In another example, Boetto and Bell (2015) developed an online unit on ecological social work as a way of addressing their concern that social work students had few opportunities to make connections between the profession, the natural environment and global citizenship.

Ways in which greater environmental awareness might be introduced into social work education via field education and service-learning activities has also been explored. Lucas-Darby (2011) included ‘greening concepts’ in a community practice course with a service-learning component, where students worked with a chosen community to identify an environmental need or concern and develop a plan for addressing it at the community level. Crawford et al. (2015) also describe developing field education curricula to include a focus on environment and sustainability. The impetus for this initiative was their recognition of the significant threat to human well-being posed by climate change and their immediate experience of the impact of drought in their rural location. Boetto et al. (2015: 62) similarly report on an initiative to integrate content on the environment and climate change into a social work programme by providing a field education placement in a local food relief programme and found that for the students involved, the placement expanded their ‘perspectives about the complex interplay between climate change, food insecurity and vulnerability’.

This emerging literature on social work education and the integration of environmental content provides useful discussion and examples of the ways in which an expanded ecological orientation might be embedded within the existing structures and concerns of social work education. However, there are calls for a deeper and more profound transformation of social work education itself (Besthorn and Canda, 2002; Dominelli, 2012; Besthorn, 2013; Jones, 2012). Gray and Coates (2015) provide a useful example of this view in their argument for a transformative shift in social work education towards an environmental perspective. Rather than simply looking for opportunities to insert environmental content into the traditional curriculum, Gray and Coates (2015: 507) identify the need for ‘a fundamental rethinking of the humanistic values and theories informing social work’. These authors suggest that as well as this values shift, a transformed curriculum would encompass a theoretical framework inclusive of environmental issues, highlight a macro-role for social workers, and link these elements with a critical understanding of policy development and implementation.

The recent literature on social work education and the environment, therefore, leads to a number of important observations. First, there is a clear and growing call for social work education to integrate environmental perspectives into the curriculum. Second, there is evidence that educators are beginning to explore how this might happen in a practical sense, with new courses being developed and embedded in existing programmes and approaches. And finally, there is an argument that while such initiatives are valuable and necessary, a more fundamentally transformative approach is needed – that simply ‘adding in’ the environment to existing approaches to social work education is unlikely to produce the type of profound change required if the
profession is to make a meaningful and effective contribution to moving towards a more sustainable world.

Pathways to change

Given the nature and scale of the environmental crisis, the argument for change in social work education seems very clear. The analysis of Australian social work courses conducted by Harris and Boddy (2017) is, therefore, deeply concerning, indicating that there is very little content relating to the natural environment in such courses (0.43 percent of all social work subjects). The authors note that some of the barriers to the integration of environmental content include the issues of curriculum lag, a lack of mandated environmental content from accrediting bodies and the impacts of neo-liberal ideology on universities in general. Harris and Boddy (2017) argue that in the face of the environmental crisis, social work educators must prioritise rapid curriculum change. However, the question remains as to how such change might be practically implemented, and what the scope of such change should be. Social work struggles with the issue of a ‘crowded curriculum’ (Jones, 2012; Boetto and Bell, 2015) as new and emerging social issues, practice approaches, theories and demands from the field jostle for space within existing programmes. Simultaneously, the higher education context in many countries is one characterised by the imposition of an increasingly stark neo-liberal, managerialist agenda, leaving educators and practitioners feeling under-resourced and overwhelmed (Lawson et al., 2015; Pease and Nipperess, 2016). In such a context, the prospect of needing to ‘add in’ another topic may be unappealing to many social work educators.

It has previously been argued (Jones, 2013) that a number of different pathways exist for changing the social work curriculum to reflect better an expanded professional ecological consciousness. The first of these can be referred to as the ‘bolt-on’ approach, whereby new content is ‘bolted-on’ to the existing curriculum by adding new units or content to a degree programme. The example provided by Beltran et al. (2016) illustrates this approach. The second option could be referred to as the ‘embedding’ approach. This pathway involves looking to embed or integrating a new content focus throughout the existing curriculum. In the case of eco-social work this means looking for opportunities within an existing programme and across the curriculum to integrate material on the values, knowledge and skills required for an eco-social approach. Kaiser et al.’s (2015) use of food justice as a lens to connect environmental issues with a wide range of curriculum areas is an example of this approach.

The third approach is the ‘transformative’ option. Rather than seeking to add the eco-social perspective into the existing curriculum, this approach advocates using the foundation concepts of an eco-social approach as the fundamental basis for social work education. In other words, this approach asks what understandings, knowledge and skills are needed to live sustainably, before exploring how the answers to this question might inform and shape the social work curriculum.

An eco-social foundation for social work education

While all three approaches discussed in the pathways to change section have the potential to improve social work education’s engagement with environmental issues, there is a significant philosophical difference between the first two options and the transformative approach. Curriculum design initiatives that seek to ‘bolt-on’ or ‘embed’ environmental content in social work programmes assume that the current philosophical foundation of those programmes, and indeed of the profession, is sound and adequate. In other words, they assume that a ‘business as usual’ approach, with the simple addition of environmental content, will be sufficient in equipping
students, and hence the profession, with the knowledge and skills required for addressing climate change and other environmental issues. However, as Coates (2003) and others have argued, the roots of social work as a profession lay in the very values and beliefs of modernity which themselves underpin the causes of the current ecological crisis. The critique of this foundation lies at the heart of Dominelli’s (2012) articulation of green social work and underpins her concern to ensure that environmental justice is holistic, and not an ‘add-on’ but integral to the reconceptualisation of social justice in the profession. In this manner the approach articulated by Dominelli (2012) argues that green social work should be integrated into the curriculum and that doing so creates the potential for the curriculum to be truly transformative.

Similarly, Boetto’s (2016) development of a transformative eco-social model for social work makes a compelling argument for fundamental change based on recognition of this problematic philosophical foundation. Boetto (2016: 16) argues that ‘the profession’s ontological foundations, based on modernist assumptions, are incongruent with an eco-social approach that aims to protect the natural environment’. Therefore, she (2016: 5) advocates for a fundamental shift of social work’s current ontological and epistemological assumptions, placing recognition of ‘identity as interconnectedness with nature’ at the centre of a transformed consideration of professional knowledge, values, ethics and practice methods, as did Dominelli (2012) previously.

Dominelli and Boetto’s arguments have direct relevance for the development of a transformed eco-social work education. The holistic, ecological foundation from which such a curriculum might be developed must be seen as beginning with a set of eco-social concepts, from which appropriate values, knowledge and skills can be extrapolated. While there is no clear consensus on what such a core set of concepts might include, a number of good starting points have been identified. Ife (2016), for example, nominates the basic concepts of ecology as guiding principles for an ecological approach. These include holism, sustainability, diversity, equilibrium, and interdependence, again points made by green social workers (Dominelli, 2012). Similarly, Coates (2003) describes a set of five ‘integrative guidelines’ representing the core aspects of the transformative worldview required if we are to move towards a sustainable future: wisdom in nature, becoming, diversity, relationship in community, and change. Dominelli (2012) drew on indigenous and ecofeminist worldviews and transdisciplinarity to shift the discourses in social work’s repertoire. Gray and Coates (2015) suggest that a transformed social work curriculum would be guided by a set of eco-centric environmental values relating to conservation, de-growth, diversity, sustainability, spirituality and restoration. Boetto (2016) draws on eco-feminism and deep ecology as the ontological foundations for a new set of values with a focus on sustainability, including values of de-growth, collectivism, ecological justice and global citizenship.

There will no doubt be discussion and disagreement about what exactly a core set of eco-social concepts and values for a transformed social work education might include or look like. However, the direction in which the profession needs to head is becoming increasingly clear. The movement required is away from a traditional, modernist and anthropocentric orientation towards a set of concepts and values which are grounded in recognition of the interdependent nature of humans’ relationship with the environment and oriented towards sustainability. From this transformed foundational consideration, a number of pedagogical approaches might arise to support and inform the development of eco-social work education as well as the actual content that such curricula might include.

Looking forward – towards an eco-social curriculum

With a foundation of eco-social concepts, principles and values, attention can be turned to the pedagogical approaches and content which could be developed and utilised in an eco-social
work programme. Such a shift would involve four dimensions: a fundamental shift in core foundations and orientation; the adoption of alternative pedagogical approaches; the addition of new core content; and the expansion of existing approaches and content.

**Alternative pedagogies: transformative learning and education for sustainability**

Transformative learning theory represents an approach to adult learning which has clear congruencies with social work values and methods (Jones, 2010; Witkin, 2014) and which has proven effective in efforts to expand ecological consciousness (see, for example, Kovan and Dirkx, 2003; D’Amato and Krasney, 2011; Chen and Martin, 2015). Based on an initial theoretical development by Mezirow (1991, 2012), the theory argues that, through processes of socialisation and acculturation, people construct ‘meaning perspectives’ that act as perceptual filters through which new experiences are mediated. Transformative learning occurs when a new experience leads to critical reflection on the foundations of a person’s frame of reference, revealing its inadequacies or limitations. As a consequence of this critical reflection, the person takes action to create a new, more open, inclusive and flexible perspective. A transformative learning approach would argue that people’s understanding of humans’ relationship with, and place in, the natural world is often limited as a consequence of their socio-cultural context and dominant discourses (anthropocentric, individualised, patriarchal, and so on). By facilitating reflection on these existing frames of reference the potential for transformation is created. An extensive body of literature exists on how such transformative learning can be fostered in the classroom (see, for example, Kasworm and Bowles, 2012; Taylor and Laros, 2014).

A second broad pedagogical approach appropriate for a transformed eco-social work education is ‘education for sustainability’, or EfS (Bedi and Germein, 2016; Sharma and Monteiro, 2016). Education for sustainability refers to an approach to education that is concerned with what we need to know, across all fields of human knowledge and action, in order to live sustainably. The Australian Research Institute for Environment and Sustainability (ARIES) states that

> Education for Sustainability . . . is an internationally recognised educational approach that moves beyond just imparting knowledge about the environment – educating about sustainability – to building people’s capacity for transformational change – educating for sustainability. It focuses on motivating and engaging people to help create a better future.

*(ARIES, 2014–2017)*

In this sense, EfS critically explores existing assumptions about the content and delivery of education and the values that underpin it. A number of sources have attempted to articulate the features of an EfS approach, demonstrating the broad scope that it entails (see, for example, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009). Bedi and Germein (2016: 127) capture a sense of this breadth in noting that through ‘embodying transformative, constructivist, and social approaches to learning, EfS aims to develop higher order thinking modes such as reflective, critical, relational, whole-of-systems, or ecological thinking’. The significance and urgency attached to implementing an EfS approach in higher education, as well as the barriers to doing so, have now been well surveyed in the literature (e.g. Gale et al., 2015; Higgins and Thomas, 2016).

**New content: environmental education and eco-literacy**

A transformed eco-social curriculum would also include some significant new areas of content. In particular, students would be expected to develop deep understandings of the natural
environment, the operation of natural systems and humans’ place in, and relationship with, the non-human world. This is a significant departure from traditional social work content. However, it is essential in a transformed eco-social approach, laying the foundation for the ontological shift described by Boetto (2016), among others, away from modernist, anthropocentric perspectives and towards recognition of fundamental human interdependence with nature. This content could be introduced and supported using insights and experience from the fields of environmental education and education for eco-literacy. Environmental education (Kopnina, 2015; Bodor, 2016) has been a feature of mainstream education systems in many Western countries for decades. Using a wide range of approaches, it involves equipping students with knowledge of nature and the operation of natural systems (Flowers et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Clearly connected to environmental education, but arguably manifesting a stronger critical analysis, is the approach of eco-literacy (Orr, 1992; Reynolds et al., 2010; Goleman et al., 2012). Recognising the interdependent relationship between humans and the non-human world, and the urgency of the current ecological crisis, eco-literacy advocates argue that a deeper understanding of the environment, and the operation of natural systems and people’s place within them, is essential if we are to move towards social and environmental sustainability. It is the loss of such fundamental understanding, or literacies, and the ensuing ecological alienation, which is a major contributing factor to the crisis that we now confront. As with environmental education, a wealth of scholarship and practical resources exists in the field of eco-literacy which could be drawn on by social work educators looking to introduce this new content into social work programmes (Turner and Donnelly, 2013; Madden and Dell’Angelo, 2016).

Sustainability itself will also need to be a key aspect of new content in a transformed curriculum. Aspects of sustainability as a concept are almost certainly touched on in many existing social work programmes but would entail a much more focused and specific consideration in a transformed approach. Social work programmes would need to commit to focused engagement with the concept of sustainability itself—the origins and meanings of the concept, how it might be measured and facilitated, and the range of dimensions related to it, including social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability (see, for example, Robertson, 2014; Blewitt, 2015).

Expanding and revising: integrating eco-social concepts

In addition to the introduction of new content, some expansion and revision of existing curriculum areas would also be required, to reflect the new eco-social foundation. In this aspect of the transformation, opportunities to integrate eco-social content into existing curriculum material and/or to amend existing material to more fully reflect the new value-base, would be explored. In some content areas this expansion will be relatively obvious and straightforward, for example, integrating material on ecological justice into an existing unit examining values and ethics in social work. In other areas, the connections may be less obvious but, nonetheless, important and valuable. Revising a unit on child protection issues to reflect the eco-social value of holism could exemplify this. Content on practice methods, such as community development, may be expanded to include attention to specific issues such as disaster management work. The area of mental health could be expanded to explore the mental health implications of people’s relationships with the environment, the biophilia hypothesis—which argues that humans have an inbuilt drive to connect with nature—and environmentally based interventions such as nature therapy. Dominelli (2012), Gray, Coates and Hetherington (2013) and Boetto (2016) all provide examples of environmental issues and related social work practice strategies that serve to highlight areas where existing approaches to education and practice might be expanded, as indicated in Figure 46.1.
A transformed eco-social approach to social work education would allow much of the existing focus of social work education to be retained. For example, education about specific fields of practice such as disability, mental health, youth, families and children will not be replaced, but rather transformed through the use of a new conceptual lens. The current domains of practice, at micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels will also remain relevant, with new opportunities, strategies and methods appearing at each of these (Dominelli, 2012). The transformation does, however, open up the potential for important new areas of social work practice including around issues such as pollution, toxic waste disposal, food security and climate change (see Gray et al., 2013) as well as giving increased prominence to existing areas such as disaster management and response. Most significantly, shifting the foundational concepts and values for the profession creates the opportunity to look at traditional issues and practices through a new lens, one that is not shackled to old paradigm thinking, but which starts with recognising what will be required to move towards a society characterised by greater sustainability across all dimensions.

**Conclusion**

The urgency attached to the current ecological crisis, and to the scale and impacts of climate change in particular, has not been matched by change within social work as a profession. While there is a rapidly growing body of literature calling for the profession to expand its traditional person-in-environment perspective better to include consideration of the natural environment, there are fewer signs of this call producing actual changes at the frontlines of practice and education. Curriculum transformation within social work education programmes presents an opportunity to rapidly respond to this crisis in a way that would have significant knock-on
effects throughout the profession. Such transformation will of necessity mean moving away from social work’s traditional ontological and epistemological foundations and towards a set of core eco-social concepts and values that place humans’ relationships with the natural world at their centre. This transformed foundation, supported by appropriate pedagogical approaches, provides a basis for introducing new core content on the environment and sustainability as well as revising and expanding existing content to better reflect an eco-social orientation. Most importantly, a transformed eco-social curriculum will help to equip future social workers with the values, knowledge and skills required to respond effectively to what is emerging as the single biggest threat to human and environmental well-being. Green social workers are working to achieve this objective.

References


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Conclusions
Towards a green society and mainstreaming green social work in social work education and practice

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Introduction
Green social work has transformative potential. It can encourage community residents to change their behaviour and develop more resilient and sustainable pathways to sustainability. Working together with those inhabiting communities assists in the transformation of social work theory, education and practice. In this chapter we consider how green social work can be mainstreamed so that all social work students and practitioners can become aware of environmental issues and environmental justice and incorporate it into their daily work. Such action can contribute to the development of a green society.

Mainstreaming green social work in social work education and practice
The increasing complexities of global environmental crises in terms of numbers affected, frequency and impact on people’s physical, social, cultural and political environments have challenged professional social work practice (Dominelli, 2012). However, environmental issues languish largely on the periphery of social work discourses, practice and education (Coates, 2005). Much social work literature on disasters ignores the physical environment (Jones, 2010), focusing instead on what social workers do or should do; for example, a number of manuals published through the United Nations (UN), humanitarian agencies like the Red Cross, the Red Crescent Societies or American Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The question of why social work remains in a disadvantaged position with regards to addressing these needs warrants further reflection and scholarly scrutiny. Given this context, the development of green social work scholarship is not only timely, but crucial.

Dominelli (2011) suggests five key processes of practice areas that social workers can undertake in carrying out their tasks during disaster interventions. These are relevant across the disaster
cycle including preventive and mitigation activities during the pre-disaster period, recovery and reconstruction stages. These activities include the following:

1. **Consciousness-raising** to highlight the interdependencies between people and planet Earth by discussing scenarios that might mitigate the hazards causing concern and promote an equitable and sustainable world.
2. **Advocating and lobbying** for equal access to green technologies and an equitable sharing of Earth’s resources locally, nationally and internationally.
3. **Mobilising communities** to devise strategies for forms of development that promote solidarity and sustainability while caring for other people, and the Earth’s flora, fauna and mineral resources.
4. **Dialoguing with residents, policymakers, and the media** to transform policies at the local, national and international levels into more life-enhancing ones that the planet can sustain. Developing curricula that cover disasters ranging from poverty to climate change and promote interventions that build individual and community resilience, capabilities and sustainability among people and the biosphere (Dominelli, 2011: 437).
5. **Challenging** social work educators to equip students with the knowledge and skills to become effective practitioners while also providing opportunities for students to transform abstract concepts into practical actions (Dominelli, 2013; Drolet et al. 2015; Jones, 2013; Steinemann, 2003).

To nurture social work students, green social work concepts, theory and practice examples should be integrated into the core modules of social work programmes. Once integration into the curriculum takes place, social work students can be assisted to respond to the interrelationships between human beings and the natural environment (Dominelli, 2013; Boetto and Bell, 2015) and communicate best practices with their peers and exchange materials with schools of social work across the globe. Social work educators and practitioners have an important role to play in developing and sustaining environmental justice in a way that respects the inherent dignity and worth of all persons (Dominelli, 2014).

Social work curriculum development, like any other, is a political process. The social work curriculum may be a prescriptive statement, specified by the professional association or a government body in a particular country. These rarely cover education for risk/disaster and emergency management, a situation evident in most curricula across the world. Nonetheless, as the contributions to Section 11 have indicated, schools of social work that do cover these topics have found that much of the core content and mainstream skills can be directly used when working in emergency response sites.

However, practitioners’ professional education has few elements that prepare them for specific disaster management roles and activities (Cooper and Briggs, 2014). Social workers all over the globe should play important roles beyond those they already play disaster rescue, recovery and preparation for future disasters. They should become involved in strategic thinking and policymaking tables. Hence, further advancements in green social work scholarship and research are warranted. Developing green social work is a humble effort in filling the gap that exists between these aspirations and contemporary realities. Courses that address disaster social work in the classroom and e-learning mode are currently rare. There are general courses on disaster and management, usually not run by social work educators, available through various institutions and agencies involved in disaster management. These are variable and often exist outside universities and their quality management procedures and structures. More use should be made
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by humanitarian workers of social work qualifications that are subject to regulatory bodies and scrutiny.

Social workers have historically contributed to disaster management in four major and overlapping areas. These are: working with individuals and families, accessing resources, managing complex interagency co-ordination, and working with communities (Zakour 1996; Quarantelli, 1985). There is a need for further efforts to integrate green social work in the social work curriculum in schools of social work globally. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and its regional organisations can make crucial contributions to these efforts, but it requires additional organisational capacity to do so.

Green social work has successfully introduced neglected issues into environmental debates and increased understanding of its centrality to social work practice, as indicated by Dominelli and Ku (2017). Green social work (Dominelli 2012) has been significant in introducing new issues into professional social work’s debates about the environment. These have included: the mainstreaming of environmental considerations so that the physical environment becomes firmly embedded within ecological perspectives and professional preoccupations; a widening of the theoretical and practice base to ensure that social and environmental justice are considered integral to any environmental (in its widest sense) involvement by social workers; highlighting the need to think of innovative approaches to socio-economic development to meet human needs without destroying physical environments; and making disaster interventions core elements in the social work repertoire of knowledge, skills, capacity-building and curriculum. The curriculum should cover green social work’s commitment to: holistic views of the world; a structural analysis of human and social development; integrating social and environmental justice; challenging neoliberal forms of social development; and highlighting interdependencies among peoples and between peoples and their physical and social environments (Dominelli, 2012; Dominelli and Ku, 2017:8).

In addition to these suggestions, green social work calls for transdisciplinary collaboration involving natural scientists, social and human scientists, and local people in responding to environmental disasters and promoting the coproduction of knowledge. Transdisciplinary collaboration is extremely important for mainstreaming green social work because it allows social workers to overcome their lack of skills in different aspects (e.g. in economic and financial, environmental and physical, chemical and biological disciplines). Social workers work hand-in-hand with other professions and residents to coproduce new models of green social work practice that will move disaster-prone societies towards more sustainable green ones.

Towards a green society

Social work, as a human rights-based profession, cannot take on every global issue alone. Alliances with others are essential in achieving transformative change. Global movements of power, politics, technology-driven capital flows and human resources are increasingly affecting human lives. To support a green social work curriculum, a green society is necessary. Greening society is the cornerstone for the survival of the Earth and everything within it. As the profession responsible for people’s well-being, social workers have a powerful mandate to find sustainable ways to save the planet. To achieve this reality, green social workers can provide meaningful strategies for the profession to adopt. The contributions in this Handbook provide the evidence that green social work initiatives are being implemented across the world and are producing positive changes already. However, so much more needs to be done by every human being, individually and collectively. Let us work together locally and globally to realise this goal.
References


