

AN OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

UN ESQUEMA GENERAL SOBRE EL TRABAJO SOCIAL EN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Although many of the early teachers came from the UK and the USA, an indigenous form of social work education was developed in Australia from an early stage. Since training moved into universities social work education in Australia has been generic, applying contemporary knowledge of society and human behaviour to a range of skills and fields with an emphasis on social work's mission and values. Today, the content, structure and teaching processes of a social work course are all contested areas, with employers, academics and the professional association all exerting their influence, but with the professional association currently having the final say. This article will focus on the tensions to determine what defines a program as social work, who may teach social work and the place of prior learning in social work education. It will also cover industry specific versus generic professional orientations, and focus on whether students should be trained for the workforce needs today or for a range of debatable future needs.

RESUMEN

Aunque muchos de las personas que inicialmente enseñaron trabajo social en Australia vinieron de Gran Bretaña o los EEUU, una forma nativa de trabajo social emergió prontamente. En cuanto se absorbió el trabajo social a las universidades, el enfoque ha sido mas general, aplicando el conocimiento disciplinario sobre la sociedad y los valores humanos sobre muchos campos de intervención, dando énfasis a la misión del trabajo social y sus valores. Hoy en día hay controversia sobre el contenido, la estructura y la metodología de enseñanza del trabajo social. Los que emplean a trabajadores sociales, los profesores y la asociación profesional tratan de influir los procesos y darles sus sellos. Este artículo se enfoca en las tensiones que existen sobre quien puede enseñar trabajo social, quienes pueden definir los programas y sobre el lugar que ocupa la experiencia profesional en la educación. También incorpora el tema de la enseñanza dirigida al empleo actual o al futuro.

KEYWORDS: Australia social work, Social Work Education, Generic training, Early social work in Australia, Current themes in Australia

PALABRAS CLAVES: Trabajo social en Australia. Educación para el trabajo social. Programas de orientación general. Historia del trabajo social en Australia. Temas corrientes

en Australia

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

As in other countries, social work in Australia is inextricably linked to its context. Its mission, techniques and knowledge-base seek to modify the context of which it is a part (O'Connor, Warburton & Smyth, 2000, p.2) while, at the same time, making itself acceptable to that context. A major driver of social work education in Australia has been the professional association, through the process of accreditation of academic courses. The profession in Australia sought to establish itself by developing training courses leading to bachelor degrees in universities, by developing a code of ethics, pursuing registration at the state level and identifying an explicit knowledge and skill base.

It could be argued that from its earliest days social work in Australia had a global focus – knowledge and skills were imported from overseas, in particular from the United Kingdom and the United States. Yet, at the same time, the profession in Australia developed its own flavour. In today's global world, the economic and social environment in Australia will offer fresh challenges to the profession in the twenty-first century.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

The first social work training in Australia was offered in institutes set up outside the then relatively new universities in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Marchant (1989) refers to a web of affiliations between women and women's organisations in Sydney who were responsible for first establishing a number of training programs in the 1920s, and then advocating for the introduction of social work training in the University. Browne (1996) notes that Australian social work was largely founded by the generosity of benefactors. These early schools were set up with the support of community welfare organisations, such as the Red Cross, Councils of Social Services and interested and influential men and women in and out of the universities. Eventually, they received reluctant institutional support from government. Medical social work was at the forefront in these developments, largely because public hospitals were where many of the community's social problems surfaced (Lawrence, 1965, p. ix).

The training courses offered by the three social work institutes in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide were transferred to the universities in those cities during World War II. These courses were initially for two, then three and finally four years. At the University of Queensland, the fourth program developed, the first students started in 1956, when both three year and four year program were offered. It took an additional nine years and the extension of federal government funding to expand both the number of programs and student places in universities for the next school to begin at the University of Western Australia. This was a dual degree program lasting five and half years. A year later, the first social work program in an Institute of Technology was started at Curtin, Western Australia. The federal Labor government of Gough Whitlam (1972-5) saw the introduction of free tertiary education and the growth of demand for social service workers to keep pace with the government's planned social development. By 1976 there were 11 schools. Today, there is double that number of programs. Many are recent in their origins and are linked to both the reform and expansion of the tertiary education sector and the growth in demand for human service workers.

At the start, the courses offered in Australia were largely developed by academics in social work and the disciplines of psychology, sociology, government, health and economics rather than by practitioners (Lawrence, 1965). The literature from the United Kingdom and the United States was used to shape thinking and to provide teaching resources. However, the final product of Australian programs differed from those overseas. Social work training was basically for practice in a range of methods and fields and focused on teaching students how to understand and make use of themselves: social workers were both therapeutic agents and agents of reform and justice (McDonald & Jones, 2000, p.7). Hoban (1947) identified five aspects behind the course planning at that time. These were the growing awareness of the need for preventative social work, an acknowledgement that all social work, regardless of the field or method used was essentially based on the same principles, the realisation that social work knowledge could be taught in the classroom as well as in the field, the need to develop the students' capacity to make use of their 'personalities' in practice and the need for social research.

In general, courses were constructed with the introduction of foundation knowledge in the first two to three years of the program, a significant period of time spent in field work, and the application of foundation knowledge to a range of fields and methods towards the end of the training. Lawrence notes that 'local pressures inside and out the universities as well as general trends determined the actual balance maintained by individual schools' (1965, p. 135). Generally, the fields that initially received specific attention were medical and family social work and the methods were casework and group work. This situation reflected the history of the prior training bodies and the demands of employers. Psychiatric social work and community work were later additions to curricula in the 1950s and 1960s.

The pattern of training described above has persisted with an expansion of the fields and methods receiving attention. It is clear that most programs cannot address all the possible areas. What is selected as a specific focus within programs is often a matter of contention with service providers who wish graduates to be 'job ready' for a wide range of work demands. The expanded number of contenders for attention has re-emphasised the importance of teaching students good analytic skills of making sure they learn how to learn and are committed to life long learning. They need to develop a broad understanding of the interaction of individuals and society in a range of social issues.

THE GROWTH OF THE SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

As in most western countries, in Australia, the growth of social and health services was associated with the need for trained personnel. The introduction of more university training places, and the increasing need for practitioners in expanding welfare services saw the emergence of a range of social work and welfare courses. Welfare training, considered a related type of training, was available in Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE) and at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges. These courses tended to be linked to specific areas of the human services industry, such as youth work, work with older people, and work with Indigenous people and so on and/or were tailored for people who would be supervised by social workers. In many of these programs social work literature was used, a number of teachers were qualified social workers and many graduates sought to upgrade their diplomas and certificates within social work programs. Welfare graduates, who sought employment in areas where social workers were also employed, worked at

the direction of social workers. This was prevalent in the health field. In other areas, for example youth work or child protection, where the positions were not labelled 'social work', the employee's qualifications did not lead to this hierarchical structure.

The Dawkins reforms of 1988 were seen as the most dramatic changes in higher education since the foundation of Australia's first universities 140 years earlier (Karmel, 1990, p.29). These reforms included the abolition of the divide between CAEs and Universities. CAEs now became Universities in their own right or were merged into existing universities. Their welfare courses were now upgraded from diplomas to degrees. In 1987 and 1988 Higher Education Charges, amounting to around 20 per cent of the cost of tuition, were reintroduced. These could be paid 'up front' at a discounted rate or deferred to be paid through the taxation system when a person's income reached identified levels. Funding universities continued to be the responsibility mainly of the Federal government. Human service training was also available at TAFE colleges, a responsibility of State governments. Articulation arrangements between social work programs and these courses continued to evolve, encouraged by federal government policy that required universities to recognise prior learning in other tertiary training institutes. The AASW now sets guidelines to help determine what credit should be given for TAFE welfare programs and university social work programs. A significant number of BSW students already hold diplomas and degrees from the TAFE sector which continues to expand its range of programs and number of students

NUMBERS OF SOCIAL WORKERS

It has always been relatively easy to identify the number of graduates from social work degree courses, but more difficult to ascertain the number of social workers in the workforce. A range of people identify themselves as social workers when they do not have social work qualifications. The growth in the numbers of social workers with Bachelors of Social Work was slow but steady until the mid 1970s. Changes in the university environment and the welfare sector at that time combined to give an increase in demand for social work training. During the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s the number of schools doubled to 22 and established schools increased their intakes. The short term consequence was a period of oversupply of practitioners.

McDonald and Jones (2000) estimated that by the 1990s approximately 1000 new social work graduates entered the workforce. Martin (1996) analysed the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on social workers in the workforce and concluded that there was a peak in 1981, followed by a slump and then flat growth for social work. The 1996 census identified 7185 social workers.

McCormack (2001) reports Labour Force Survey (LFS) data. This data shows growth up to 1995 and then continuous growth each year to give 11,400 social workers in November 2000. McCormack (2001, p. 67) suggests that from this data it is reasonable to conclude that the occupation of social work is adapting well to the changes in the workforce. The main employing industries between 1991 and 2000 continued to be the health and community services (around three quarters of all social workers) with 64% employed by government agencies and almost all the remainder in non-government services (McCormack, 2001 p.69). In Australia, social workers continue to be employees rather than practitioners in private practice. They also are more likely to be female and to have an older age profile

compared to all other occupations in 2000 (McCormack, 2001, p.67).

Growth in membership of the professional association has been less marked. Membership is voluntary but has, since the 1990s, become more attractive because it includes low cost professional indemnity, a form of insurance. In 1949, three years after it was established, the Australian Association of Social Workers had 300 members. By 1974, it had grown to 1,700 members (Lawrence, 1976), by 1998 it had 5571 (Jones, 2000) and in 2004, it had approximately 6000 members.

CONTEMPORARY HUMAN SERVICES

The areas of social and community services continue to be one of the fastest growing sectors of the Australian labour market. The 1991 Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) analysis projected a major growth for community services in general and social work in particular. The report concluded that social work would have the second highest rate of occupational growth in the next 10 years (83.1% - behind a projected growth for psychology of 93%). The para-professionals in welfare were projected to increase by 53.8%. While social work continues to supply a significant amount of the theoretical base used in training human service workers, individuals with social work degrees are a relatively small part of that sector (McCormack, 2001); others are increasingly undertaking tasks and functions which social workers perceive as their domain (O'Connor, 1997, p.21).

There is a trend towards the declassification of many positions previously designated as 'social worker'. This process reflects the goals of the economic reform agenda of the present government which focus on providing a multi-skilled, flexible and more part-time, and casual workforce. The labour market for social work is now much more open. There are many more opportunities for social work graduates but also a greater range of graduates of other disciplines or careers in competition for positions once thought to require social work degrees. These changes will have an impact on education for social work and accreditation requirements in a changing human services industry.

ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

A great deal of effort has been and is still put into gaining 'registration' of social work or social workers in Australia. Occupational groups are registered under state legislation. This sets up professional boards, largely funded by professional associations and responsible to government for the professional conduct of members. Registration is then required to practice, say as a teacher, doctor or psychologist. Apart from a brief period in the late 1980s - early 1990s when social work was registered in the Northern Territory, attempts at registration have been unsuccessful. Yet, the Australian Association of Social Workers continues to support this process. It also remains a key agenda item for Association of Heads of Schools of Social Work. Regulation of the profession is currently through accreditation of programs of study leading to a Bachelor of Social Work and through the activities of the AASW which disciplines members who have been found to have acted unethically. The AASW cannot, however, prevent their employment as social workers.

In regards to the accreditation of social work courses or programs, formally, social work education in Australia conforms to the accreditation requirements of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). The AASW was formed in 1946 from a collection of state based associations. Membership was restricted to social work graduates. This group

did not seriously turn its attention to questions of appropriate training for social workers till 1956. By the late 1950s, most universities had accepted that the standard for social work training was a four year degree. The professional association and the universities entered into what has become a long standing debate around accreditation. On the one hand, some favour the 'input model', linked to appropriate content for courses and appropriate field placements, and on the other, many support the 'output model', linked to competencies.

The AASW accredits courses and individual membership in the association is dependent on holding a recognised social work qualification. The introduction to the current *Policy and procedures for establishing eligibility for membership of the AASW* states that it 'presents the principles, desired goals, and minimum requirements of social work education. People who meet these minimum requirements are eligible for membership of the Association' (AASW, 2000, p.1). This document articulates a perspective on the purpose, function and direction of the profession, outlines the minimum requirements for courses in terms of staffing, structure and content and describes the review process used to assess whether or not courses meet the eligibility criteria.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

The guidelines outlined in the AASW (2000) policy document represent the last iteration of a number of attempts to define not only what will be assessed in any accreditation process, but also how this process will be carried out. Reviews are initiated by the AASW, usually on a five year cycle. A number of AASW members have been selected and trained by the association to do these reviews. Members of this trained accreditation group may also be asked to act as advisors to new schools that are being established. The panel for a program review consists of three members from this group, two nominated by the AASW and one by the School under review. The review is chaired by one of the AASW nominees who have had experience in another program review. The review is carried out on-site and works from a document prepared by the school in advance. The panel meets with senior university staff, the academics and students involved in the program and employer representatives. The review is an opportunity for the program to assess its own performance and perhaps seek AASW support in its negotiations with universities for resources. Some programs may become defensive about the training they offer and reviews can then become quite tense. At times the AASW accreditation of programs has been in doubt and this has resulted in changes to programs to maintain accreditation.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS: OVERSEAS GRADUATES

Graduates of overseas social work programs, who wish to be accredited as social workers in Australia, need to apply to the AASW, the designated assessing authority, as gazetted by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on 1 July 1999. The Association's requirements (AASW, 2000) acknowledge that some countries do not require the four year degree with entry level, structure and content similar to those required in Australia. They aimed to develop a system and process of assessment that reflects this diversity. For example, social work degrees of three years tertiary duration that are accredited as the local professional qualification and have an appropriate amount of field placements in another country may be accepted as comparable to AASW requirements if

the applicant has at least three years professional social work experience within ten years of obtaining their degree. The assessing committee may recommend that the applicant apply for membership or that he/she undertake further study in an accredited social work program.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Courses can be structured in a variety of ways. The baseline is that graduates must complete the equivalent of a minimum of four years full time study. In the year 2000, four year integrated programs were seen as the most common structure. Another option was two year programs undertaken after a minimum of two years of a first degree which contained appropriate courses across the disciplines seen as relevant to social work (eg. sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, history and economics). The program of study must lead to a distinct named qualification in social work. It can be offered off-campus in distance mode as long as students are on-campus for five days each semester.

The policy has been to have professional accreditation at the bachelor's level in Australia. These degrees attract Higher Education Contribution fees for the university or school. Students can pay their fees 'up front' or defer them until the student's income reaches a designated level, when the fees are gradually repaid through the income tax system. When students already have a bachelor's degree in social work they are eligible to do a masters degree, offering a higher level of training and attracting a higher rate of fees to the School. These programs are not linked to membership of the AASW. Some schools are currently exploring with the AASW the possibility of their accrediting an initial or first level social work training at the master's level to graduates of suitable programs other than social work.

There is concern that the use of master's degree to provide initial level training will erode the value of both the BSW and the MSW. Bachelor degrees providing the same training will perhaps be less competitive in the market than master's degrees that provide entry level training. The current master's degrees will need to be re-badged to make it clear that they provide advanced levels of training and there may be pressure to convert these to DSW programs. This, in turn, will put pressure on the existing DSW programs offered by an increasing number of schools. A number of equity issues are also raised. The recent sharp increase in Higher Education Charges (HECs) paid by students or deferred as an ongoing debt has coincided with a drop in the number of students from lower socio-economic groups, particularly Indigenous students, entering university into all courses. If Schools were to transfer base level training from bachelor to master's level, students would be required to pay higher fees for training for a profession that has adequate, but not high levels of pay. This would likely further exacerbate the current unsatisfactory situation that discourages students from disadvantaged groups in society. Transferring training to higher degree levels is also likely to fuel the transfer of training in the human services to the work settings, away from the increasingly expensive university training. This is most likely to happen in areas such as youth work, child protection or work in a multicultural context.

CONTENT OF COURSES

The AASW's underlying assumptions in the description of required course content are

that 1) there is a generic base to social work knowledge and practice; 2) that it is crucial that graduates learn how to learn in a rapidly changing environment, and 3) that they have a commitment to the mission of social work. Three areas are outlined as essential content for Bachelor of Social Work programs in the AASW policy for accrediting programs: knowledge for practice, practice knowledge and skills and field education.

Knowledge for practice covers information from other disciplines leading to an understanding of society and how it is organised. It should also provide knowledge of social welfare arrangements, their history and organisation, and the way the law in Australia impacts on practice. Knowledge of the individual, including human development and behaviour, family and social networks, health and ill health, disability, vulnerability and resilience is also 'knowledge for practice.' Furthermore, practice knowledge and skills must be based on a socio-political understanding of social issues and human development, and must be studied for a minimum of two years. Students need to be able to critically analyse society and its impact on individuals and there must be a focus on empowering and non-oppressive practice. The areas covered must include knowledge of all the methods of social work intervention, ranging from interpersonal work to policy analysis; practice skills, including interpersonal skills; communication skills; the skills of reflective and critical thinking and analysis; data collection and management, negotiation and mediation; the skills of making assessments and deciding on the most appropriate intervention with which to respond. Material on the recognition of and thinking through of ethical issues with reference to the AASW Code of Ethics must also be included. The social, political, economic, historical, cultural and ecological contexts of social work at local, national and international levels add to the broad requirements.

An area of particular concern to both training bodies and the AASW is the issue of field placements. While the document is fairly open about the ways the rest of the core curriculum might be covered, it is much more explicit about field placements, that part of the program where academia and the profession clearly meet. The policy document uses roughly three pages to outline the content of social work education and two of these pages refer to field education. The length (in number of hours) and breadth of placement, who might be a field educator (a role reserved for people with a BSW degree), who might organise placements, the required support of students and field educators during placement, the location of placements, the number of hours of supervision, the curriculum for and the assessment of placements and the issue of placements in the student's place of employment are all outlined. There is considerable disquiet in a number of schools about the capacity of the field to continue to provide placements as described in the policy document and the capacity of students to finance the commitment that is required.

Placements have been offered in a range of formats over time, and it is not unreasonable to expect that the current changes in the welfare workforce, brought about by the marketisation of welfare, will result in further models of field education. One of the current pressures from the field is risk management when student social workers are the main contact with consumers. The policy in most schools is clearly that field educators rather than students are responsible for the work that is done. However, a number of organisations are becoming increasingly nervous about the risks associated with a student working with vulnerable clients and have sought ways to manage those risks (eg. Crime and Misconduct Commission Enquiry into child protection or Queensland Health policy

on field placements, 2004). At the other extreme schools are worried about placements that are offered when organisations do not have the person power to complete desired tasks, and the student is used as an unpaid member of the workforce. The management of field placements is an important issue for most schools. Most programs find this part of the curriculum expensive and complain that their programs are not funded to a level that supports best practice in organising placements and supporting field educators and students through the placement process.

ARTICULATION OF THE BSW WITH OTHER QUALIFICATIONS

A further area of concern is the articulation of the various forms of human service training. The AASW supported the principles of accreditation outlined by the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (1996), a forum for university CEOs in Australia. In essence, holders of degrees and diplomas in social welfare can receive credit for a minimum of 25 per cent of the program and for some degree programs the credit may extend to fifty per cent of the program. The amount of credit for field education is limited to twenty-five per cent of the first placement and this can create tension because it is seen as too limited in some contexts. The AASW does not support the recognition of prior life experiences as a basis for exempting students from any course content. Most universities would agree with this stand, and would use prior life experiences only to support special entry to a program that the candidate might not otherwise achieve, given their academic record.

This accreditation model predominantly focuses on inputs and is criticised for its lack of attention to outputs. Some schools and some areas of the profession (notably mental health) have pushed for a competency based approach, with more recognition for prior learning. They believe there should be an emphasis on assessing what students can do rather than the courses they have completed. While there has been tension at times between academics and the AASW, in general these standards are seen as useful in backing requests made by schools of Social Work for appropriate staffing in their university settings. The AASW is also aware of the limitations of relying on their accreditation policy to ultimately define social work practice and has recently produced practice standards for social work (AASW, 2003). These standards are framed in terms of outcomes, reflecting both the importance of social workers looking at and evaluating the impact of their practice and demonstrating the effectiveness of that practice (AASW, 2003, p.4).

PROFESSIONALISM

From its inception in Australia social work has used a strategy of professionalisation to ensure occupational growth and development. Lawrence (1965) calls his text on the development of social work 'Professional social work in Australia' and begins by outlining the traits of professionalism as appropriate goals if social work and social workers are to achieve positions of influence. This view of professions—describing the special attributes that marked them as unique (Abbott, 1995, p. 547), dominated social work in Australia. It was argued that social work needed to become politically influential if it was to achieve its social justice goals. The drive towards professional status led to locating undergraduate level training in universities and later developing post graduate coursework and research programs.

The development of local knowledge for practice and the acquisition of specialised

knowledge and skills were subjugated to the search for a unifying framework and to the search for effective ways to promote the aims of social work in Australia:

The social work profession is committed to the pursuit and maintenance of human well-being. Social work aims to maximise the development of human potential and fulfilment of human needs, through an equal commitment to:

- *working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being.*
 - *working to achieve social justice through social development and social change.*
- (AASW Code of Ethics, 1999: p.5)

While each of the above themes has provided an orientation for the profession, they can be critiqued in the current environment. The two commitments above impose limitations on individual practitioners in terms of sufficient specificity of skills and knowledge and on their ability to move between the personal and the political in arguing social justice agendas and mobilising for action.

The professional association has been a significant player in establishing social work as a profession in Australia. It developed and maintains a code of ethics, set and monitors education standards which were accepted by universities, succeeded in getting eligibility for membership set as an entry requirement with a number of employers, assesses overseas qualifications, outlines a professional knowledge and skill base for graduating practitioners, publishes a national journal, is affiliated with international associations and runs national conferences .

While many social workers have been somewhat ambivalent about the Association's emphasis on the achievement of professional power, this strategy has been seen as valuable to help insure that 'the members of such an occupational group would be deemed of sufficient value to employers, the state and the community as a whole to ensure sustained demand for their services, at a price commensurate with their level of education and responsibilities' (McDonald & Jones, 2000, p.4). It can be said that while social work has achieved many of the trappings of a profession in Australia, it has not converted these into a strong, sustained demand for its professional services.

REGISTRATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

A number of unsuccessful attempts have been made to achieve registration (a State jurisdiction) and these continue. In particular, in the health and mental health fields, social workers are the only occupational group that does not have mandatory registration, and this is seen as eroding its legitimacy, leaving its practice open to colonisation by others and suggesting that social work is second class citizens among other professions in the health fields. At the recent meeting of Heads of Schools of Social Work, in Launceston, Tasmania (2004) this group developed a constitution and identified one of its goals as achieving registration. While the critique of social work as a profession has introduced a significant degree of scepticism about the value of this approach, the impact of the recent registration for social work in New Zealand was noted by Heads of Schools, as a reason to renew efforts for registration.

It must be noted, however, that social work in Aotearoa New Zealand did not have a bachelor's degree as a minimum standard of entry to the profession and hence not a

clear system for the accreditation of programs (Beddoe, 2000). This is not the situation in Australia, and perhaps, this might help explain why those in government have not believed it was necessary to protect consumers of social work services with registration. Registration in Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in an overhaul of training. It is also associated with a rapid increase in the demand for people with accredited degrees in the human services in that country.

THE CURRENT CONTEXTS OF HUMAN SERVICES AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

It is clear that changes over time in the education of social workers in Australia are strongly linked to the changing service context, on the one hand, and on the other, to the changing tertiary education environment. Australia's community services industry has been adjusting to a reconstruction of the country's welfare state (Bryson, 1994). Macro changes include shifts in social policy and micro-economic reform, changes in funding community services and in the labour market (McDonald, 1999).

Social policy changes are associated with economic reform and a reconfiguration of the role and function of government. There was a shift away from the Keynesian inspired welfare state arrangements to free market economic policies, a selectivist approach to income security policy, and a reduction in state activity either by the total withdrawal of funding, or by shifting the balance of responsibility for the cost of a wide range of services from the state to the individual (O'Connor, Wilson & Setterlund, 2003). "Mutual obligation" has been used to re-defined work and welfare by stressing 'the market over the state in the provision of income' (Saunders, 2002, p.230). Saunders points out that while the market increasingly relies on the existence of welfare provisions, 'the means of achieving welfare goals have become increasingly market-oriented' (2002, p. 53).

This orientation is clear in the contemporary development of funding models. The previous input models, where programs were funded by grants and had a considerable amount of discretion on how those monies were expended, were largely replaced by output based funding models that use contractual devices and tendering processes. Supply side factors linked to providers are giving way to demand side factors linked to funders and consumers of services. They have become the dominant mechanisms in the quasi-markets of welfare (McDonald, 1999, p. 20).

The current model, designed to reconstruct the way in which service delivery is funded and to shift power from providers to consumers and purchasers of services, has had a direct impact on the community service labour market. As noted earlier the size of the industry is growing as is the qualification base of its workers. The industry now takes a competency based approach to specifying entry requirements to employment. It is interested in a multi-skilled, flexible workforce. In this process the role of the TAFE sector has expanded (McDonald, 1999, p.21). The knowledge and skills that support this competency approach are drawn from a professional knowledge, much of which has its origins in social work. Opening up the community services market to anyone who has the competencies or meets the selection criteria when these are not linked to professional qualifications has made the traditional social work labour market more competitive. On the reverse side, more diverse positions are now open to social workers (O'Connor, 1997, p. 21).

Another important aspect of the changes has been the erosion of positions designated

as 'senior social worker' with middle managers disappearing and front line staff given more responsibility. Many people with social work qualifications are in management positions but they do not always self-identify or are acknowledged as social work professionals. O'Connor (1997) notes that this should be an issue of concern to the profession as a whole and to those who design social work programs. If social work is not to be excluded from the 'process of critically thinking about the nature of human needs and the development of appropriate responses' (p.22) its front line staff need to continue to be interested in the way services are organised. The links between practice experience and public issues is important and social workers need to occupy leadership and management positions in roles that are not likely to be designated as 'social work'.

The tertiary education sector has undergone rapid change that impacts on teaching, particularly in relation to professional programs. In the labour market constant change means that skills and knowledge can become outdated, tending to lower the value of knowledge and skills expensively acquired at universities. In addition their previous monopoly on knowledge and skills (Kumar, 1997) is challenged by industries which have developed their own training (Bauman, 1997). Universities must now link more closely with industry and respond quickly to their requirements (Shapiro, 2000, p. 112). They are also under increasing pressure to earn money to pay academic salaries – through offering fee paying student places, quantum from research performance and consultancy fees. As a consequence, many academic units have significantly increased their teaching and research load without increasing the number of staff. The industry with which social work schools interact tends to pay moderate wages and to have little ability to pay large amounts for research or higher degree training. These are significant handicaps in a fee-for-service environment. 'User pays' cuts across the cashless economy that has traditionally marked the trading relationships between social work programs and human service organisations as they negotiate for placements, advice, staff training and access to research sites and advice. Both universities and the human services industries are under stress in the current environment.

One issue of importance to both universities and social work is the process of globalisation and issues of internationalisation in relation to curricula and social work practice. Universities encourage their programs to recruit students from overseas as a way of raising revenue and broadening the program to go beyond a domestic perspective. Internationalisation is taken to mean that courses encourage students and academics to take an overall global perspective. Johnson (2004) points out that the ideal of understanding issues in a global context is often not followed through in course content, field placement opportunities and research efforts. In the Australian context students are likely to study the impact of globalisation of markets on the life chances of populations at the local, national and international level, are likely to have contact with some fellow students from different societies, but are unlikely to study abroad. In part this reflects the relative poverty of many social work students as well as a bias towards studying close to home. Many graduates do travel and indeed are actively recruited, especially by the United Kingdom and Eire.

CONCLUSIONS: THE FUTURE FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

What should social work's role in the contemporary human service industry be? It has been argued that social work is positioned on the margins professionally – that it is our

role 'to contest and contend', not to be value neutral (Furlong, 2000, p. 15). McDonald and Jones (2000b) offer some agreement with this position when they note that 'Australian social work comprises an unusual mix of values, aspiring both to traditional professional status and to being on the margins' (p.20). However, they argue that the challenge is to find ways that social work can engage more centrally. O'Connor (1997) argues that social work should play a significant leadership role in the development of social and community services directed by the mission of the profession. This commitment to leadership should inform curriculum development as well as the activities of the professional association. Leadership should be in the context of developing and championing an ideal that promotes social justice, helping the disposed to be heard and developing leadership skills in others.

A core issue is the question of how social work will survive in this environment. It is suggested that rather than defending professional boundaries as a strategy to survive, social work should be entrepreneurial, build on its capacity to deal with complexity and enter into arrangements with other occupational groups. This approach suggests that social work is, and should capitalise on its status as a profession with permeable boundaries (O'Connor, 1997, p.26). It is in this fluid environment that social work students should be given the opportunity to develop leadership skills, skills in working collaboratively with others and organisational skills.

It can also be argued that the curriculum should put more emphases on curriculum content which helps graduates better understand and operate within the contemporary environment. Bryson (1994), for example, argues for a greater emphasis on political economy as a cornerstone of critical analysis for social work. McDonald (1999) argues for the inclusion of knowledge and skills around the management of risk and the complexities of managing service provision (p.24). It is also suggested that curricula focus more on specific skills and less on broad overarching frameworks so that social workers are more competitive with other professions who are increasingly represented in human services (Martin, 1996). Finally, others suggest, the curriculum should include comparative social policy in a global environment, as a way of understanding the puzzle of privatisation and competition as it applies to human services and choices (Ernst, 1996, p.9).

There is a balance to be struck between meeting the needs of organisations for job ready graduates for today's human services demands, and producing graduates who are equipped for an uncertain, and certainly changing future. Programs wish to attract students who are making a commitment of time and increasing amounts of money to their training for employment in an area that is not highly paid, tends to attract publicity only in relation to problems and does not have a clear career path relative to other professions. In the current environment, programs seek to appeal to people with an established interest in social justice and an affinity for people who generally lead extremely challenging lives. An argument has been made that in the context of human services at large, social work should be seeking to provide leaders who can identify strategic directions and be informed decision makers. It has been said that social workers need to be able to make a defined difference in the lives of individuals and communities in addition to being competent practitioners.

A further tension lies between equipping graduates who can authoritatively and appropriately challenge the status quo as well as fit into defined human services roles in specified jurisdictions such as mental health or child protection, where conforming to protocols is the primary agenda.

These are not new issues for the profession as a whole or for educators, but they are made more complex by the impact of the current political and economic environment on the human services labour market and on the lives of people who are marginalised in Australian society.

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