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# Guest Editorial

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*Liz Beddoe has edited this special issue of Social Work Review. Liz was convenor of the Social Work Education symposium held in Auckland in January 2006. She is Head of Social Work and Human Services at the University of Auckland.*

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It is with great pleasure that I introduce this special issue of *Social Work Review* with a focus on social work education. My thanks to the Editors and the ANZASW Publications Committee, for providing this opportunity.

Most of the articles in this special issue were presented at the one day symposium, Social Work Education: the Impact of Registration, held on 31 January 2006. This event was hosted by the Social Work team at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, New Zealand. We were delighted to have the participation of more than 50 colleagues from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, England and Scotland.

A special welcome was offered to Professor Vivienne Cree from Edinburgh University who agreed to give a keynote address to this event as well as for the Practical Experience in Professional Education Conference 1-3 February, also hosted by the University of Auckland.

We set the themes broadly within the focus of the impact of registration and professionalisation strategies on the education and development of social workers. While these issues are significant in Aotearoa New Zealand, discussion with colleagues from other countries suggested that they would be of interest to them as well. This was reflected in the breadth of presentations and indeed in the articles that were submitted for this issue of *Social Work Review*.

The themes included:

- Fit for practice? The role of schools of social work in deciding who is a fit and proper person to be a social worker.
- Cultural competence to practise social work with Maori and in our diverse ethnic communities
- Is social work education up to the challenges?
- Can social justice ideals survive professionalisation? Issues for educators
- Curriculum in the new social work environment; changes? challenges?
- Career-long learning for practitioners.

The theme of determining who is a *fit and proper person* for social work is explored in an article by Beth Crisp, who considers the significant issue of access to social work education in relation to incarcerated students. Barbara Staniforth and Christa Fouché consider the problems of regulation and litigation in social work education contexts as educators attempt to determine fitness for practice. Both articles highlight the often contradictory pressures that are experienced by educators as they balance their personal and professional values, which might promote inclusive policies, with the clear expectations of the field, that educators will act as gatekeepers. Educators often sigh, and mutter that it's not straightforward – a social work degree is an academic journey as well as a professional one. Students pay fees and

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give up jobs to study; to 'counsel them out' or even terminate their place in a programme is not as easy as it sounds.

The willingness of educators to share their teaching models and describe innovations and challenges was a feature of the symposium and is reflected in many of the articles in this issue.

The theme of development of *cultural competence* is examined by Pauline Ward, who describes the student as 'te rito or the new shoot of the korari (flax)' and explores the journey of students as they undertake practice learning. Vaiolesi Passells and Judith Ackroyd consider the significance of Noho Marae learning experiences (common in social work education programmes) in developing social work students' understanding of identity and difference.

*Personal professional development* is a theme in a number of articles. Brenda Clare explores the development of professional identity, presenting messages from her research. Her article describes significant dimensions of identity; 'perceptions of the professional world and of professional-self-in-the-world', which promote and maintain a robust personal-professional credibility and the capacity for positive engagement with stakeholders in social work encounters. Carole Adamson explores the challenges for social work education in relation to stress, trauma and critical incidents. She suggests an ecological framework to understand of these risks and assists students to develop greater resilience in their future practice.

There would be no social work educational event that didn't address the ever-demanding matter of *field education* in social work education programmes. Kathryn Hay, Kieran O'Donoghue and Jenny Blagdon report on research findings and consider whether the commonly identified aims of field placements are being achieved in the views of field supervisors and students. Nancy McGregor, Claire Perry and Pat Shannon describe the development of E-learning processes in problem-based distance social work education. The importance of developing group support and cohesion, alongside the skills and motivations required for self-directed distance learning is emphasised in a very useful account of a distance programme.

The theme of *social justice* is addressed by Phil Harington in his article on practitioner scholarship and civic literacy. Phil argues that social work needs to consider the development of civic literacy in its response to the critical rumblings that call for more scholarly principles to be evident in social work practice. He suggests that social work has a 'unique window on the world', and as such an ethical and professional obligation to theorise, conceptualise and test assumptions that arise in practice.

Practitioner *continuing education* and development is addressed by Cherie Appleton and Nicki Weld in their discussion of a Learning Lab approach. Utilised in the development of strengths-based practice, this learning methodology offers practitioners and others opportunities to explore, develop, create and design through an inclusive participatory process. It is hoped that this article will stimulate others in agencies to develop workplace learning initiatives of this nature.

In the registration environment, *continuing education* becomes a necessity not a luxury. Issues of cost, access and choice abound. Two additional articles, both initially presented at

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the Continuing Professional Education Conference (also hosted by the University of Auckland in April 2006) round out this collection. Andrew Lynch's paper poses some key questions about how practitioners maintain a critical, reflexive stance in their practice. He provides a thorough exploration of a framework of structural reflexivity that can guide social workers to seek professional development opportunities that nurture their commitment to social justice. My own article on continuing education explores the responsibilities of practitioners and employers in making decisions about continuing education, and attempts a response to the vexed question of how to make the best choices.

I hope the social work education symposium is an event that can be repeated. It provided a great opportunity for educators from practice and academia to share their ideas, concerns and passions. We are delighted to advise that the keynote addresses and selected symposium papers will be published separately, as conference proceedings.

I wish to acknowledge the support of many colleagues in New Zealand and Australia for their efforts in peer reviewing this issue, and Margaret Barnett for her support with the management of the symposium and the editorial process.

Liz Beddoe  
October 2006.

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