Career Portfolio

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Teaching Philosophy

To be a social work lecturer in New Zealand the Social Workers Registration Board requires you to be a registered social worker with a current annual practising certificate. I view my professional identity as that of a registered social worker educating the social workers of the future and conducting research that contributes to the kete of social work knowledge in New Zealand and internationally. In terms of professional practice I have a background in health social work, working with violence and statutory social work. Craig and Muskat (2013) used the following seven themes to describe the way that health social workers are required to work: bouncer, janitor, glue, broker, fire-fighter, juggler, and challenger. Many of these functions have a strong educative role and as a social worker I have always been an educator, the difference now being that I am educating in a formal academic environment as opposed to work with individuals, whanau, communities and colleagues.

Teaching social work students is my passion, growing reflective learners who can apply critical thinking about power and structural issues to practice is important. Enabling students to see beyond social work practice at the micro level and consider context and power in their everyday practice is vital to ensuring that students develop a practice framework that moves beyond issues of individual difficulties and strengths to empower individuals by involving them in systemic change. This philosophy is influenced by critical theory, feminist theory and a social constructivist perspective in which structural inequalities are addressed and the personal is also the political. Social justice underpins my social work practice and the work that I do as a lecturer, and I believe that the work that I do teaching social workers of the future will make a difference in our community.

For my PhD I am following a constructivist grounded theory research design (Charmaz, 2014). I have a constructivist approach to research and to teaching as well. The average age of the BSW students is about 32 years and the students bring with them a rich tapestry of life experiences. It is not my job to teach it is my job to facilitate learning and rich discussions, so that students can feel safe to ask questions and contribute to classroom dialogue. Students need to be able to draw on their understandings and interpretations of the world and make links to the learning that they are acquiring so that knowledge can be constructed and co-constructed so as to enhance the understandings of practice, theoretical knowledge and self that a good social worker needs.

My role as a lecturer is to facilitate learning to an active and engaged group of students. Learning is a process in which everyone contributes, has a voice and diversity is appreciated. I model social work practice in classroom discussions about current events and issues. I strive to create a teaching and learning space that prompts students to question and develop their own answers, while also challenging assumptions. I have an open door policy and work to develop supportive relationships not only between myself and the students, but members of year groups, and across the whole of the BSW so as to build a community or culture of social work practice. Time is also spent
developing and maintaining relationships with social work stakeholders in our community so as to enhance fieldwork placement experiences and to be responsive to the needs of the sector. Wenger (2000) asserts that ‘knowing is an act of participation in complex social learning systems’ (p.226) and stresses that competence is developed through a sense of belonging that is maximised through engagement, imagination and alignment. The importance of belonging and creating a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) is an integral part of what I try to develop in my role as a lecturer, I work hard to actively engage students, to develop a social work culture so that a strong professional identity is formed and through stakeholder engagement utilise the concept of alignment to ensure that the education that the students are receiving is relevant and responsive to the needs of social work service users.

Innovative teaching examples

Three examples of innovation in my teaching practices that I will illustrate in this career portfolio are related to my belief in the value of experiential learning. The first is a constructive challenge role play, the second is a mock Family Group Conference and the third is a Mock Court.

Prior to going out on the first fieldwork placement experience the third year BSW students are required to do a detailed role play involving an angry young Samoan teenage girl in Foster Care and Pat who is a middle age Pakeha Foster Care Social Worker. The students are put in pairs and each get a turn at playing both parts. Prior to starting the role play students are asked to consider practice principles and theory about working with teenagers. Child Youth & Family Social Workers are present to witness the role play and provide support. The students appreciate the feedback that they receive from the social workers and the learning they gain throughout the exercise. The students report that the role play assists them with gaining an understanding of constructive confrontation as while they are in role they are required to challenge the teenager about her behaviour and the students feel that they have space to try a few different practice techniques in order to build trust and rapport with an angry teenager and to develop a collaborative process of guided discovery. After this exercise the students complete a critical reflection that is worth 5 marks in which they explore issues of power and control in relation to what they experienced in the role play and how they themselves respond to constructive challenges. After this role play I have a Family Group Conference Coordinator come into the class and speak about the work that she does engaging troubled families through coordinating Family Group Conferences. The Coordinator then gets the students to role play some of the dynamics and tensions that exist within a Family Group Conference. This exercise enables students to work with challenging dynamics and integrates well with the teachings that I do on constructive confrontations when working with discrepant information.

When the social work students enter SOCW404 Social Justice Ethics and Law one year later they are then involved in a Mock Court Simulation. The Mock Court simulates a case that would be heard in the family court, and the students get to envisage and experience both the court process and the application of justice to the Care of Children Act (2004). The primary purpose of the exercise is to demystify the court process and allow students to put into practice the legal knowledge, concepts and skills that they have learnt during the course of the paper. Social workers are bound by legislation and need to have strong awareness of legal accountabilities on both a personal and
organisational level. The Mock Court exercise takes place in the Family Court in Tauranga, with Child Youth and Family Lawyers and Managers playing the part of the Judge and legal team. The students have to give evidence in court and are held accountable to the evidence that they provide to the court. The purpose of the Mock Court is to synthesize learning; it is a formative exercise that is strategically designed to build on the learning that they have developed throughout the course of their BSW as well as their own live experience.

Examples of my teaching and assessment practices

I design assessments that encourage the integration of theory into practice in order to nurture students’ ability to critically reflect on knowledge gained. Students are active participants in the lectures that I facilitate and the seating arrangements are such that the students sit facing each other and the front of the class so as to foster collaborative discussion and learning. Class starts with a karakia followed quickly by panui in which students reflect on the week that was, drawing on current events in the media and discussion is had about how these events relate to the papers learning objectives. Participation is vital in learning and as the Chinese proverb states “Tell me and I’ll forget, show me and I may remember; involve me and I’ll understand”. This proverb aligns with my teaching beliefs about the importance of action and reflection in social work education. Thought and reflection are key ingredients in social work education and the cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) illustrates how reflective practice is developed. This quote from Biggs and Tang (2007) about writing tasks sums up some of my teaching beliefs about assessment design:

Writing should require students to undertake open-ended activities that make use of existing knowledge and beliefs, that lead them to question and reflect on that knowledge and to theorize about their experiences and to apply theory to practical situations, and/or solve practical problems or problems of understanding (p. 212).

To illustrate how my teaching beliefs are enacted I will discuss the tutorial assessment component of SOCW404 Social Justice, Ethics and Law in which students prepare for lectures by reading an assigned journal article and preparing a one page critical analysis of the reading. In class the students are assigned to small groups and in each tutorial they are given ten minutes to discuss the ‘Positives, Minuses and points of Interests’ (PMI) that developed out of the specified reading (De Bonno, 1985). Each week a different student is asked to present their groups critical analysis back to the class in order to ensure that all students have the opportunity to further develop their public presentation skills. Social work practice involves group facilitation and social workers are often used as educators within their organisational context. Presenting to groups and group facilitating are essential skills that students need. Some students require practice to help them to gain confidence with group presentations and the tutorial component assists them in performing these types of tasks.

The tutorial readings all cover critical material that supplements class learning to reinforce key concepts. Using the PMI framework means that the students report back their observations rather than simply regurgitating the key findings of the readings. This exercise enables students to think deeply about what the readings mean to them personally and what implications the readings could have on their future social work practice. Irons (2008) asserts that students will not essentially
engage in activities they way that we expect them to, but act according to how they see value in the situation. The tutorial component of SOCW404 is formative rather than summative in its intent, despite the fact the journal reflections are worth twenty per cent of the final grade. Irons (2008) describes formative assessment as “a developmental activity and an opportunity to try things out without pressure” (p. 41). This type of assessment is what I wanted to create in my teaching and is why the Mock Court exercise is not formally assessed, as I want to develop students thinking further and for them to be able to start to identify their own practice framework. I want to avoid students writing their journal responses strategically or to feel that the activity was based on a judgement made of work done. The exercise was primarily formative as it created ‘feedback/feed forward’ and encouraged dialogue (Irons, 2008) for students about their learning. However a small percentage mark is attached to the activity in order to provide the motivation for the students to complete their reflections.

Irons (2008) states that a major issue for lecturers is balancing the quality and timeliness of feedback so as to maximise benefit. The students received feedback from me personally via written feedback on assignments handed in and through general feedback surrounding themes and issues that arose out of the marking process. I used a strengths based approach to teaching and would verbally and non-verbally affirm students in class with regard to comments made or questions asked. I was also always present before and after class and students could also contact me via email. The effort that I made to be available to the students was appreciated by the students as they reported back on the Standard University Appraisal forms that I was very approachable. The maturity of the SOCW404 students assisted me with developing this teaching initiative; they appeared to be open and honest in their feedback and eager to learn, this gave me the freedom to experiment with teaching technique and learning activities. Overall I feel that I achieved what I set out to do; the students were actively and enthusiastically engaged in learning, with lots of relevant and reflective class discussion.

**Evaluation feedback on my teaching**

Jones and Joss (1995) purport that knowledge is never complete and cannot be considered separately from understandings or acquired values. The tutorial assessment described above required students to apply knowledge and thought to the content of the journal articles throughout a comprehensive process. An award winning student who is a natural leader within the classroom setting and is a student who is looked to for guidance stated that even though there was a significant amount of work involved in the journal reflections it was a worthy exercise. She stated that the emphasis on the development and understanding of the course readings meant that she and her classmates really understood the underlying concepts behind the lecture material and that they learnt a lot. Another student told me that while she did not enjoy the extra work and time pressures related to the weekly readings, she felt that because the activities were centred on the readings she was prepared for class and things made more sense. The end of semester evaluations affirmed these statements as the students indicated that they enjoyed the tutorial readings and group discussions and this can be evidenced in the fact that five out of nine students stated in the course appraisal that they should be maintained. Nine of the 11 students were present in class on the day of the course appraisal. Five students stated that the assessment tasks were always appropriate to the course
objectives and four stated that they were usually appropriate. When considering the results of the SOCW404 course appraisals, the evaluations indicated that for the category ‘This teacher encouraged me to get actively involved in learning tasks’ there was a mean score of 1.2 and a mean of 1 for ‘Overall, this teacher was effective’. The students appeared to enjoy classes and always had a high level of enthusiasm. This can be evidenced in a mean score of 1.3 for ‘This teacher made the subject interesting’. The paper received a mean of 1 for ‘This paper challenged me intellectually’.

For the SOCW101 paper course appraisals in written feedback the students commented that the quality of lecturers was of a very high standard, that they were very approachable with plenty of time for interaction and questions. The written comments from the SOCW101 paper this year was included the following statements - ‘Her passion for the subject; ‘clarity in all lectures’; ‘her sense that she made everyone feel as though they counted or had something useful to contribute’, ‘explained things very well and made it easy to understand; ‘her passion for social work. It is evident that she has practiced in the field; ‘her approachability’; ‘her (tactful) no-nonsense approach to addressing off-topic comments!’ and my favourite ‘Kelly is a great and knowledgeable lecturer and very approachable. Her teaching style and communication is great’.

The evaluations for the B semester are yet to be received but in personal emails from students this semester I have received the following comments – ‘I hope you don’t mind me saying but I was really impressed with how you managed the issues that came up in class today. I feel like I am learning a lot from you on how to deal with people. Phew I don’t know how you do it’ and ‘I just wanted to say thanks for everything you’ve done for me in first and second year. I probably won’t see you again as I will not be coming back to Tauranga next year. I am not doing good down here so I have decided not to return. It has been awesome having you as a lecturer in both years. I appreciate all that you have done for me. Thank you’,

Thanks were also received from a manager of a regional social work service for the quality of the University of Waikato Social Work graduates. She stated that from her perspective the graduates do well in job interviews and in fieldwork placement; they are able to demonstrate critical thinking and are outstanding in practice as newly qualified social workers. This service employs a large amount of social workers, so to be noticed and thanked in this manner had great meaning. Feedback from Social Service stakeholders reflects the comments made above and the reputation that the BSW regionally is very commendable. This consistency in positive feedback is very important to our programme and also hard-won by the University of Waikato Social Work Programme staff. See attached for a letter written by a colleague who is a Lecturer on the Bachelor of Social Work Programme for evaluation feedback on my teaching.

Examples of professional development

Completing the Post Grad Certificate is Tertiary Teaching is an integral part of my professional development, as the study towards this qualification has helped me consolidate my identity and professional practice and it has allowed me the time and space to reflect on efficacy in teaching and learning in social work education. I am currently in my second year of completing my PhD through Auckland University and my topic for this research is ‘Realising Values: Experiences of congruence and incongruence in health social work done with new-born infants and their families’. The research
for my Phd is beneficial in that it adds to the depth of my academic knowledge when teaching and the increased knowledge about the process of research design is beneficial with supervising Honours projects. In 2013 I completed a week long Nvivo course through NZSSN Qualitative Research Techniques. I have monthly peer supervision with a Social Work Lecturer at another University in which we support each other with the practice requirements of being a social worker within a University. I usually attend and present at least one conference per year, this year’s conference presentation was titled 'Reaching Out Together: Connections through Social Work' in Abbotsford, Canada.

**Contributions to the teaching and development of others**

21 March 2012: Invited to present to the Allied Health Social Work Team at the Bay of Plenty District Health Board. Presentation made.


25 March 2013: Invited to be a reviewer for the textbook, for a chapter in an edited book titled “Building Social Work Scholarship in Education and Practice: Innovations from the Asia Pacific” for Dr Bala Raju Nikku.


30th April 2014: Invited to present research to a Teaching and Development Unit Workshop. Reflective practice workshop and presented PGCert work that resulted in a publication on Mock Court scenario.

17th June 2014: Invited to facilitate the strategic planning process for the Aotearoa New Zealand Professional Association of Social Workers. Accepted this invitation.

5 September 2014: Conducted a BSW Social Work Conversations Seminar titled ‘Examining hesitancy in professional Decision-making’.

9 September 2014: Invited to present a workshop for the Tauranga Moana Abuse Prevention Network. Presentation made and titled ‘Bringing violence into the open: Are you aware of hiding tactics’.

17 September 2014: Invited to present a workshop to the Western Bay of Plenty Playcentre Association. Presentation made and titled ‘Child protection issues for early childhood providers: Signs of something amiss.’

March – September 2014 and 2015: Student Supervision: On-going supervision of research by SOCW490 BSW Honours student.
8 October 2015: Invited to present research to a Teaching and Development Unit Workshop. Reflective practice workshop and presented PGCert work that resulted in a publication on Mock Court scenario.

Published resources on teaching

References


Appendix 1: Colleagues Evaluation Feedback on Teaching