

Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand

Exploring fields
of practice

Kathryn Hay,
Michael Dale and
Laren Cooper



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New Zealand**

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Lareen Cooper**

The authors dedicate this book to
their loving and supportive families.

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Chapter One

Introduction — Exploring Fields of Practice

Youth social worker Sarah Vaelua.

CHOOSE

HAPPY



YOSS



This book has been written in response to the requests of Bachelor of Social Work students wishing to be introduced to the various social and community work fields of practice earlier in their degree. It is primarily aimed at social work students, but may also be helpful for social workers returning to practice or for social workers from other countries seeking to understand the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

This text presents five fields of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, through the lens of five social workers. The social workers each present their understanding of their field through describing:

- their organisation
- their field of practice
- the theories and models utilised
- the key issues and challenges
- bicultural considerations, and
- the reasons for working in their organisation.

Each field of practice is supported by a narrative linking the social workers' perspectives with relevant literature.

The five fields of practice are:

- youth social work
- youth justice residential social work
- community faith-based social work
- adult mental health social work, and
- women's health social work.

Exploring fields of practice

This section introduces: (1) an analytic framework for examining the different fields of social work practice; (2) ways of understanding the interplay between theory and practice; and (3) how bicultural social work practice can be considered within a field of practice. These three perspectives, in combination, offer a way to interrogate a particular field of practice.

Framework for examining a field of practice

When considering a field of practice, particular emphasis should be placed (1) on the utilisation of the available frameworks of analysis, and (2) on the knowledge base relevant to each field. Relevant knowledge bases include theoretical explanations and research, practice principles, models of assessment and intervention, and current issues.

Kamerman (2002) suggests that ‘fields of practice’ refers to: the settings in which social workers practise; the social problems in which social workers intervene; and the client population whom social workers help. Additionally, Nash, Munford and Hay (2001) and Alston and McKinnon (2005) argue that a field of practice may be defined and described by: the nature of the problems involved; the client group; the service providers; specialist knowledge; historical antecedents; and current issues.

Fields of practice are fluid — they emerge, disappear and combine in response to new social problems, changing values and new legislation (Kamerman, 2002). Dulmus and Sowers

(2012) point to the influence of changing demographics and socioeconomic patterns. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, work with migrants and refugees is an emergent field. Also, following the Christchurch earthquakes, work with victims of trauma has received increased attention (see van Heugten, 2014).

The following are examples of fields of practice: addictions; care and protection; family violence; youth and youth justice; iwi-based social work; Pasifika social work; social workers in schools; probation; health; mental health; working with the elderly; refugees and migrants; spirituality and faith-based social work.

Assessing a field of practice

The following questions form the basis for assessing a field of practice:

- What is the focus?
- Who are the clients?
- What is the experience of the clients?
- Who are the key service providers?
- How did this field of practice develop historically (both internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand)?
- What specialist knowledge and skills are related to this field of practice?
- What theories and models inform practice in a particular field?
- What are the assessment, planning and intervention processes that are used within this field of practice?

- What are the current issues for the field of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally?

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Alston, M., & McKinnon, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Social work: Fields of practice* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

This is an Australian text divided into the following sections: working with particular groups and communities of interest; social work practice settings; and emerging trends and issues in social work. It is worth checking out when you are searching for information regarding a particular field.

Connolly, M., & Harms, L. (Eds.). (2013). *Social work: Contexts and practice* (3rd ed.). Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

This text is divided into three parts: social work and contemporary issues; fields of practice; and professional issues in social work. In particular, there are chapters directly relevant to fields of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Dulmus, C., & Sowers, K. (Eds.). (2012). *Social work fields of practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

A text drawing on the US context that traverses the following fields: child welfare; family-centred practice; school social work; substance abuse; mental health; disability practice; geriatric social work; veterinary social work; social work with the military; international social work; immigrant and indigenous populations; and diversity.

Nash, M., Munford, R., & Hay, K. (2001). *Social work in context: Fields of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Palmerston North: School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Massey University.

Despite being an older publication, this text provides very good analysis of various practice contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Linking theory and practice

When exploring a field of practice it is important to consider how social work theory informs the practice that occurs. As you read about different fields of practice and listen to the views of various practitioners, it is important to explore and reflect on what is being said.

Three approaches to this task are outlined briefly: (1) Payne's (2006) three-way discourse; (2) a comparison of the empirical and reflective approaches to knowledge development and use; and (3) Howe's (2013) key questions for relating theory to practice. They offer different ways of considering the relationship between theory and practice.

Payne's three-way social work discourse

Payne (2006) advances the argument that all practice, practice ideas, all social work agency organisations and all welfare policy result from the interaction of three views of social work

that are labelled: *therapeutic*, *transformational* and *social order*. The important differences between these views of social work connect with different political views about how welfare should be provided.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF PAYNE'S DISCOURSES

THERAPEUTIC VIEW

- The therapeutic view sees social work as seeking the best possible well-being for individuals, groups and communities in society, by promoting and facilitating growth and self-fulfilment.
- A constant spiral of interaction between workers and clients modifies the clients' ideas and allows workers to influence them.
- Clients affect workers' understandings of their world as they gain experience of it.
- There is a process of mutual influence called *reflexiveness*.
- The therapeutic view expresses in social work the *social democratic political philosophy* that economic and social development should go hand in hand to achieve individual and social improvement.

TRANSFORMATIONAL VIEW

- The transformational view argues that we must transform societies for the benefit of the poorest and the most oppressed.

- Social work aims to develop cooperation and mutual support in society so that the most oppressed and disadvantaged can gain power over their own lives.
- The transformational view expresses the *socialist political philosophy* that planned economies and social provision promote equality and social justice.

SOCIAL ORDER VIEW

- The social order view sees social work as an aspect of welfare services to individuals in societies.
- Social work meets individuals' needs and improves the services of which it is a part so that social work and services can operate more effectively.
- The social order view sees social work as maintaining the social order and social fabric of society, and supporting people during periods of difficulty.
- The social order view express the *liberal or rational economic political philosophy* that personal freedom in economic markets, supported by the rule of law, is the best way of organising societies (adapted from Payne, 2006).

Using Payne's discourses

When you examine a field of practice, or complete a field education placement, you can use Payne's discourses.

- For example, in the child care and protection field of practice, is there a dominant discourse?

- Can you see evidence of the interplay between the three discourses?
- What are the implications of the different discourses for the construction of practice in this field?
- How do they influence the choice of social work approaches that are used in this field of practice?
- How useful is Payne's construction?

You can apply this critical lens to any field of practice.

Empirical and reflective approaches

Healy (2014) discusses social work theories that are intended to guide and explain practice, and identifies two prominent schools of thought regarding the development of theory: the *empirical practice movement* and the *reflective tradition*.

Empirical practice

The empirical practice movement emerged during the 1970s as an attempt to build a scientific, credible and politically acceptable knowledge base for the profession (Epstein, 1995). In this tradition the primary purpose of social work knowledge is to provide guidance for accurate assessment, diagnosis and problem-solving activity (Pray, 1991; Scott, 1990; Trotter, 1999). Schön (1995) identifies 'technical-rationality' as a dominant epistemology for professional practice that is reliant on the scientific paradigm. In the model, the professional practitioner should first acquire practice knowledge that is scientifically

derived before developing skills of knowledge application. The application of practice skills involves instrumental problem-solving techniques that have been validated through scientific theory and research (Nai, 1998; Schön, 1995).

Healy (2014) notes the following characteristics of this viewpoint.

- It is able to respond to the demand by employers and the public for accountability — service providers should be able to articulate the knowledge base for decision-making, especially when this interferes with the civil liberties of service users.
- It is popular in fields of high-risk decision-making (e.g. care and protection, criminal justice) or areas where evidence-based is valued (e.g. health).
- employs a ‘top-down’ approach — the researcher develops and tests social work theory that the practitioner then applies in practice; the social worker is the user, not the creator of knowledge.

Reflective tradition

Schön (1995, pp. 48–49) argues the case for the development of an epistemology of practice that can account for the intuitive processes that practitioners may bring to a practice context often characterised by ‘complexity, instability, uniqueness and value conflict’. This view is supported by Goldstein (1998), who suggests that, while theoretical and practical skills are useful, at critical decision points the practitioner will draw on the experience-based reflective wisdom. The focal point of this type of practice is the nature of the relationship between the

practitioner and their client, a relationship that Schön (1995, p.295) characterises as a 'reflective conversation'. The reflective practitioner seeks to develop insight and understanding of a particular client situation through a reflexive process in which both of the participants have the capacity to know, understand and construct meaning (Schön, 1995). While the reflective practitioner should be professionally qualified and technically competent, it is the ability to develop a practice approach that is a synthesis of empirical theory, client knowledge and inductive reasoning that distinguishes the reflective approach.

Healy (2014) identifies the following characteristics of the reflective position.

- It recognises the practitioners' lived experience of practice as a basis for making and using knowledge in practice.
- It places the practitioner at centre-stage in knowledge development and use.
- It recognises and values social workers as active creators and users of theory and other forms of knowledge.

Consider the following questions posed by Healy (2014, p. 36) regarding assessing theories of social work practice.

Empirical practice viewpoint

- What research evidence do we have about the effectiveness of this theory in practice?

- In what practice context was this theory developed and tested?
- How transferable is this knowledge?
- How has this theory stood up to testing?
- What is the strength of the research evidence?

Reflective perspective

- How well does this theory fit with my practice experiences?
- What and whom does it include or exclude?
- How might I use it to develop my understanding of my practice experiences and those of service users?

Finally, consider the utility of Healy's argument that we construct our own purpose in social work through 'negotiation' between (1) our institutional context, (2) our professional knowledge and skills base, and (3) our frameworks for practice (Healy, 2014).

Howe's key questions

Howe (2013) outlines stages in the core social work process, and lists five key questions, which provide a useful framework that can be used when you reflect on social work practice within a field of practice, in particular, regarding approaches to assessment and intervention.

| Stages in social work process | Key questions |
|---|--|
| Formulation of problems and identification of needs | <i>What is the matter?</i> This question helps the practitioner to define problems and identify needs. Supplementary questions could include: For whom is it a problem? Who benefits if the need is met? |
| Analysis of the case and completing an assessment | <i>What is going on?</i> Perhaps the most important question. The situation is assessed, analysed, diagnosed, interpreted or explained. |
| Setting of goals and objectives | <i>What is to be done?</i> In light of the assessment, goals are set, objectives identified, plans made and intentions declared. |
| Design of methods of work and intervention | <i>How is it to be done?</i> The methods, techniques, skills, services and resources needed to achieve the goals are chosen and deployed. |
| Review and evaluation of the involvement | <i>Has it been done?</i> The outcome is reviewed and evaluated. |

(Adapted from Howe, 2013, p. 401)

Three approaches have been outlined that are intended to provide you with some ‘lenses’ to apply to the challenge of linking theory and practice. In the following section, our attention turns to the final perspective that can be used when examining a field of practice: that of bicultural practice.

Bicultural practice

A unique feature of the Aotearoa New Zealand social work practice context is responsibility for a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-based society. In particular, members of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) are required to: understand tangata whenua perspectives; avoid imposing monocultural values and concepts on tangata whenua; and be actively anti-racist in their practice (ANZASW, 2013, p. 7).

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) also places emphasis on competency to practise social work with Māori in a safe and culturally responsive manner. The SWRB has prepared a draft 'kaitiakitanga' framework grounded in Te Ao Māori principles that is the subject of ongoing consultation



with both Māori and non-Māori social workers. (Visit the SWRB website for further information: www.swrb.govt.nz.) When assessing a field of practice, it is important to consider how any particular approach responds to tangata whenua (Munford & Sanders, 2010).

Ruwuhi (2013) writes about indigenous issues in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following key points emerge: (1) the interrelatedness of spiritual, natural and human dimensions is important when working with Māori; (2) cultural understandings of Māori and their whānau will be enhanced by a knowledge of history, the role played by narratives in sustaining identity, and indigenous concepts of well-being; (3) knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi and its contemporary

relevance is the key to understanding cross-cultural relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand; and (4) these insights can be used to develop culturally responsive practice.

In particular, Ruwhiu engages ‘Te Mahi Whakamana’ — that is, mana-enhancing theory and practice — and provides guidance regarding how social work practice can assist Māori clients to build their strength and resilience by:

- engaging with clients through listening, understanding and respecting cultural difference
- valuing the contribution of whakapapa and cultural narratives to restorative healing processes through the generations
- reaffirming the ability and capacities of whānau to engage in self-determination, and providing support to do so
- recognising that the cultural wisdom embedded in Māori ideological and philosophical beliefs can generate solutions or resolutions to Māori welfare concerns (Ruwhiu, 2013, p. 135).

When you examine a field of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, consider the following.

- What can an individual social worker do to meet Ruwhiu’s challenge to understand the significance of history?
- How would you explain the argument that narratives can promote identity?
- What steps could you take to develop mana-enhancing practice?

In this section, three perspectives have been introduced that can be used in combination when you are examining a field

of practice. In particular, Kamerman's framework offers a set of core questions on which to base your investigation, while the ideas regarding linking theory and practice and employing mana-enhancing practice provide a basis for developing a more substantial critique.

How to use this book

The next five chapters on the different fields of practice all follow a similar format. The social workers and their agencies are introduced, and then the following aspects of their practice are explored under the following headings:

- Theories and models
- Current issues
- Challenges
- Bicultural considerations
- Why they choose to work in that field of practice.



Readers may choose to engage with each chapter in different ways. Short videos of the social workers talking about each of the aspects above are available using the URL below or by scanning the QR code.

 www.massey.ac.nz/socialworkbook

You may prefer to read one section of the chapter and then listen to the social worker speak about that specific area, or vice versa. Selected abbreviated video transcripts are provided

in each chapter, so you have the option to read as well as listen to the social worker. Alternatively, you may prefer to primarily focus on the videos and then dip in and out of the text as you wish. We have also included photographs of the social workers in their organisations, and graphics about some of the models they utilise in their practice.

We have intentionally developed a multi-media text to enable students and other interested readers to hear first-hand from social workers, so as to gain a better understanding of their practice, the contexts they work in and their field of practice.

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