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**People, Policies and Practice: Social Work  
Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand from  
1949-1995**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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**Elizabeth Gillian Mary Amaryllis Nash**

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## Abstract

This thesis is a case study of the history of social work education in Aotearoa/New Zealand between 1949, when the first professional course for social work was established, and 1995, when the social services Industry Training Organisation was formed. It traces influences responsible for shaping social work education. Key questions focus on the nature and provision of education for social workers, how this has changed over time and why. Three organisations (the New Zealand Association of Social Workers, the New Zealand Social Work Training Council and the New Zealand Council for Education and Training in the Social Services) had degrees of authority over policy making, setting standards, accrediting courses, or advising governments in matters relating to social work education. These provide a focal point for the research. Key people in the field of social and community work contributed their personal views and histories, adding depth to this account through their oral data.

This history has been organised into three chronological periods. It is argued that in the earliest period social workers recognised their professional identity in a common pursuit. Later, they claimed professional autonomy, making efforts to consolidate it although state and employer interests were converging and distancing themselves from those of educators and the social work profession. Most recently, social work is diversifying and the fragmentation which is occurring reflects national and international economic and political systems. The reduction in state responsibility for the direct provision of welfare is shaping social service provision and education and national trends reflect the international scene.

It is argued that people, policies and practice have each in their own way influenced the changes that have taken place in the provision and styles of social work education. This study has documented and discussed these influences (covert and overt) and the constraints affecting them. The implications for the future of social work education are inextricably intertwined with the delivery of social work services. Concerns are expressed over the directions currently being taken in both spheres.

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Finally, mistakes are, of course, my responsibility.

## Preface

I was drawn to carry out research in this area for several reasons. In the first instance, I have been involved in social work since 1970, when I was accepted as a graduate student on one of the new, generic social work courses which sprang up in response to recommendations in Scotland, England and Wales, that social workers should operate from one all-encompassing social service agency. I was therefore one of the first of the new, generic social workers. Secondly, I have worked in a number of capacities as a social work educator and practitioner in Aotearoa/New Zealand since 1984. This has sparked my interest in the policies and people which have been influential in shaping the core curriculum and provision of courses. The question of why social work education looks the way it does fascinated me.

Social work as a university subject established its first footing in New Zealand after the Second World War at Victoria University College, Wellington. The university colleges were wary of its academic status and they have displayed a continuum of support ranging from consistent enthusiasm for professional social work education at one end of the spectrum, through moderate interest, to reluctant involvement ending in non-involvement.

Funding for professional education (and the lack of funding) has played a significant part in the development of social work education. Both Parliament and Cabinet were at times inclined to support social work education reluctantly and only under pressure. Government departments with responsibility for social work services, such as the Child Welfare Division and the health sector, stand out as having an interest and input into this area. The Child Welfare Division and its successors, the Department of Social Welfare and the New Zealand Children, Young Persons and their Families Service, dominate the scene as employers. The less-documented and non-governmental contributions of the voluntary sector and professional associations have also been crucial. They have ensured debate and contest between the stakeholders as to what social work is and ought to be about, with consequences for social work education and training.

My Masters thesis used a feminist methodology to study feminist social work as practised by social work students and their supervisors in 1986. I was able to observe a radical approach to social work as it was gaining confidence and challenging the status quo. Since then, I consider feminist social work models of practice have received little encouragement from the establishment, particularly in comparison to indigenous/Maori models. Understanding the history of social work education in Aotearoa/New Zealand requires looking at it from many angles. This I have tried to do. This has meant that, while feminist interests are important and have been acknowledged, the research is not informed by an exclusively feminist perspective.

Other perspectives have played an important part in this history, including those of community workers, Maori, Christians, humanists, anarchists and the social work profession itself. I have tried to depict these often conflicting points of view where they have informed policies, trends and influential people in the history. The changes in social service delivery have brought into being a much tighter system of service delivery, such that, in some agencies, the social worker may be expected to regard whoever purchases that agency's core services to be the client. What has become of the radical, client advocate version of social work? Was it ever realistic? These questions have been raised for me as I have grappled with the data for this study of social work. The social justice element remains a crucial ingredient, in my view, for social work and provides a value-orientation within this thesis. In organising and presenting material for this historical case study of professional social work education, I have tried to let people and facts speak for themselves. I am aware that this process is one in which I will "exhibit and examine my alliances at the same moment" (Viswasweran, 1995: 132, in Wittmann, 1998: 17).

As the historical picture took shape through this thesis, the arguments of community workers and their social work supporters were studied. They presented a strong challenge to the perception held by so many professional social workers of themselves as altruistic champions of social justice. This was a significant challenge, because it questioned the foundations on which social work professionals based their core curriculum, arguing as they did that it was a necessary preparation for their work as advocates for the oppressed. This history looks at what happened when community workers, who regarded social workers as maintainers of the status quo rather than

social activists, began gaining better access to the finite resources available for social/community work students. These historical events modified my personal perception of social work as it is practised in Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, the ideal type remains and is reflected in some of the aspirations for social work held by respondents.

I was employed as a student unit supervisor in a health setting in 1987 and in 1988, I was employed as a full-time member of staff in the Social Policy and Social Work Department at Massey University, with responsibility to co-ordinate the new Certificate in Social and Community Work. In this position, I became aware that I was at an intersection in which several competing interests met. The academic institution employing me had been reluctant to offer this new, part-time and extra-mural<sup>1</sup> programme. The Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations was desperate to find an institution to host such a course and my salary was paid for by two large voluntary organisations for three years while the course became established. The Aotearoa Community Workers Association was officially very critical of this new course, regarding it as yet one more example of the universities tying up resources which should be available to community workers. I experienced the full force of this criticism when I went to the Aotearoa Community Workers Conference in Teapot Valley, near Nelson, in 1988 and introduced myself as the co-ordinator of the new Certificate. Despite the negativity, many individual community workers took advantage of the flexibility of the extra-mural, part-time programme and have completed it. Several statutory agencies also supported the new course by encouraging their staff to enrol and helping them to complete their studies.

When visiting a British university in 1992, I was asked to present two workshops on anti-discriminatory social work. I was astonished to find the students carefully segregated into categories on a spectrum from minority and other groupings to mainstream categories. When discussing with these adult students, who were all experienced social workers, the reasons for this segregation and for the introduction of the new module (anti-discriminatory practice) in the curriculum, I found them disturbingly unaware of the philosophies underpinning their new curriculum. This was combined with a lack of a critical appraisal of the curriculum itself. I became more than ever interested in the history of social work education and how important it is for students to be aware of the professional values and

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<sup>1</sup> An extra-mural programme is taught at a distance.

socialisation embedded in their programmes of study and how these ingredients got to be there.

As someone with a working interest in this area, I have been fortunate in gaining access to people who have been willing to discuss their part in this history of social work education and give their own interpretations and opinions on matters. My personal and continuing involvement will have affected what people have been willing to discuss with me and inevitably this will colour my account.

I have been given access to archival material that would quite possibly not be made available to complete outsiders. The questions I sought to answer have been revised as my understanding of the area broadened and deepened. Finding links and making connections between people working in the social services at every level and over time has been fascinating and revealing, as too, has been the work of interpreting their actions and what they stood for. I have sought to write a balanced account of events and to cover opposing views and opinions of certain events in an inclusive fashion. This approach will be discussed in the Methods Chapter.

# People, Policies and Practice: Social Work Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand: 1949-1995

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