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JUST PRACTICE

AND THE

BEGINNING SOCIAL PRACTITIONER

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study looks at how beginning social practitioners have taken up the idea of social justice as an abiding principle for their social practice. Social justice is an aspiration for practice in the fields of counselling, community work and social work. This study explores the understandings and expectations held about this in the social practice literature and looks at how this commitment is developed through the eyes of a group of beginning practitioners.

Six new graduates from the UNITEC Institute of Technology Bachelor of Social Practice (hereafter BSP) programme were interviewed for this research. The meaning that social justice has for these participants is discussed in the context of literature about social justice as it relates to the social practices of community work, counselling and social work. A model of social justice in relation to change that I have developed provides a framework for these discussions.

The part that participants' personal stories and the contribution of the UNITEC BSP programme to the development of their commitments to 'just practice' form the other major parts of this study.

The literature on the teaching of social justice is explored and provides a context for a review of the curriculum and teaching on the BSP programme. How social justice features and is taught within the BSP programme is discussed in some detail. For all participants, the BSP programme provided significant learning about social justice.

The salient feature that emerges from the study is the way in which the BSP teaching programme crystallises the meanings of social justice for all participants. It inspires participants to take on social justice as both a desirable and attainable goal for their practice.

This study has identified the need for more extensive research on this topic, here and in other countries, and from the perspective of minority cultures. Ways to strengthen the BSP programme and other teaching programmes in their teaching of 'just practice' are recommended. The provision of 'hands on' learning opportunities are proposed, along with more integrated teaching approaches and ensuring that practitioners are equipped with strategies to sustain their 'just practice' are proposed. Questions are put to the wider social services community about their part in the practice of social justice.

DEDICATION

To Roger

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Contents	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
The Idea of Social Justice	1
Justification	2
My Interest	3
The Study	4
Thesis Outline	5
Chapter 2 Social Justice	7
Introduction	7
The Nature of Social Justice	7
The Nature of Social Practice	10
Historical Origins of Social Practice	11
Counselling	12
Community Development	12
Social Work	12
Social Justice as an Expectation of the Professions	13
Social Work Profession	14
Counselling Profession	16
Community Work Profession	17
Discussion	18
Development of Social Practice in Aotearoa New Zealand	19
Social Justice during the 1970s	20
Rights Movements of the 1980s	21
Activism in the Eighties	22
The 1990s – Fighting a Rear-Guard Action	23
Into the Twenty-First Century	23
Social Practice and Social Justice	24
Chapter 3 Social Practice, Social Justice and Social Change	28
Introduction	28
The Discourses of 'Just Practice'	28
'Just Practice' in a Post-modern Context	29
My Model of Change	30
Practice with Individuals, Groups & Families: Maintaining Social Stability	34
Advocacy	34
Practice with Groups, Communities & Institutions: Maintaining Social Stability	35
Practice with Individuals, Groups & Families: Generating Social Change	36
Empowerment	36
Radical Social Work	37

Just Therapy	39
Narrative Practice	40
Strengths Perspective	41
Practice with Groups, Communities & Institutions: Generating Social Change	41
Social Change	41
Community Development	43
Anti-Discriminatory, Anti-Opressive & Emancipatory Practice	45
Anti-racism	46
Feminism	48
Summary	52
Practices Supporting Social Stability	52
Practices Supporting Social Change	52
Chapter 4 Methodology	54
Methodological Approaches	54
Research Design	55
Sources Of Material	55
My Position	55
Ethical Issues	56
Reciprocity	57
The Interview Guide	60
Working with the Participants	61
Drawing Meaning from the Material	62
Validity	62
Countering Bias & Addressing Researcher Power	63
Focus Group	64
Writing up the Findings	66
Summary	68
Chapter 5 The Discourses Of Social Justice In The Practice Of Beginning Practitioners	69
Social Practice	69
Just Practice	70
Freedoms and Participation in Decision-making	73
Discussion	76
Providing Access to Life Opportunities to Realise Individual Potential	76
Discussion	78
Addressing Structural Injustices	80
Providing for Equity Internationally and Across Generations	83
Summary	84
Maintaining Social Stability	85
Supporting Social Change	85
Chapter 6 Teaching ‘Just Practice’	86
Introduction	86
The Teaching of ‘Just Practice’	86
Self-Reflective Practice	87
Social Identity Theory	89
The Reflexive Self	91
Experiential Radicalisation	92

Teaching Experiential Practice	93
UNITEC Bachelor of Social Practice Programme	95
Bachelor of Social Practice Curriculum	96
First Year of Study	97
Second Year of Study	99
Third Year of Study	100
Discussion	101
Bachelor of Social Practice Teaching and the Teaching Literature	102
Bachelor of Social Practice Teaching and the Model of Change	102
Chapter 7 What Participants Had To Say About The Bachelor Of Social Practice Programme	104
Introduction	104
Prior Interest in Social Justice	104
Programme Contributions to 'Just Practice'	107
Courses and Topics	108
Influence of Lecturers	110
Contribution of Readings and Assignments	112
Fieldwork Placement Experiences	112
Influence of Fellow Students and Friends	115
Experiences of Injustice on the Programme	115
Discussion	116
Chapter 8 The Contribution Of Personal Stories To The Development Of 'Just Practice'	119
Introduction	119
Major influences that Shaped Participants' Ideas about or Interest in Social Justice	120
Influence of Parents	121
School Experiences	122
Religious Influences	122
Period in which Participants Grew Up	123
Experiencing Discrimination	124
Life Events	125
Gender discrimination	126
Previous Education	127
Participants' Beliefs and Values that have Informed their 'Just Practice'	128
Resonance of Social Justice in Practice	129
Discussion	130
Chapter 9 Conclusion	131
Introduction	131
Developing the Palette	131
Background Colours of their Personal Stories	132
Nurturance and Inspiration	132
The Social Context	132
Personal Connections	133
Sketching the Outline: Learning from the Bachelor of Social Practice Programme	134
Australian Study	134
British Study	135
Brush Strokes from the BSP Programme	136

Structural Understandings	136
Techniques of Practice	137
Experiential Learning	138
Learning by Example	139
Enriching The Canvas - The Performance of 'Just Practice'	139
Aspirations for 'Just Practice'	140
Social Work Practices	140
Counselling Practices	141
Community Development Practices	142
Advocacy- Giving Voice	143
Valuing People	144
Brokering Power	145
Countering the Dominant Discourses	146
Sustaining Oneself	146
Further Research	148
Teaching Practices	149
The Wider World of Practice and the Professions	150
Conclusion of the Study	151

Appendices

Appendix 1	Letter of endorsement from Gavin Rennie, UNITEC Head of School of Community Studies	152
Appendix 2	Letter to members of 'Just Practice' course	153
Appendix 3	Ethics approval from Massey University Human Ethics Committee	154
Appendix 4	Invitation letter to UNITEC graduates to participate in the study	155
Appendix 5	Information sheet	156
Appendix 6	Interview guide	158
Appendix 7	Consent form	160
Appendix 8	Focus group outline	161
Appendix 9	UNITEC BSP degree structure	163
Appendix 10	UNITEC BSP course aims and learning outcomes	168

Bibliography 177

Tables

Table 1	Principles of Social Justice Linked to Types and Functions of Social Justice	27
Table 2	Year 1 Curriculum. Bachelor of Social Practice	97
Table 3	Year 2 Curriculum. Bachelor of Social Practice	99
Table 4	Year 3 Curriculum. Bachelor of Social Practice	101

Figures

Figure 1	Just Practice: Model of Change	31 & 71
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