Internalization of green social work on the protection education curriculum and social empowerment in Indonesia

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Abstract
In this new era, the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia through the Bandung Social Welfare Polytechnic developed a Social Protection and Empowerment curriculum that is internalized with Green Social Work in producing social worker practitioners. In the previous curriculum, the non-physical environment was not a special concern in the educational curriculum. This paper discusses the increasingly visible movement to expand social work's connection to the environment and the calls for greater professional engagement in this area. The researchers aim to explore, using the qualitative method. The key informants and supporters came from educational curriculum developers at the Social Welfare Polytechnic, students, and alumni. The results showed that the Green Social Work education curriculum for undergraduate students of social work had excellent outputs. In addition, through the Green Social Work curriculum, it can respond to and deal with contemporary problems such as handling vulnerable communities to the impacts of climate change and having environmentally friendly professional capabilities.

Keywords: Green social work, social empowerment, social Protection, social welfare, policy.

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1. Introduction

Despite stubborn resistance from some quarters, the public is beginning to recognize that anthropogenic climate changes pose enormous challenges for humanity and the planet [1,2]. While climate change is certainly not the only environmental issue facing the earth today, it has emerged as the most urgent and pressing of issues, both overarching and linked with a long list of environmental concerns including deforestation, biodiversity loss, food and water security, pollution, and waste [3-6]. There is no clear evidence of how anthropogenic climate change is already impacting both natural systems and human well-being [7-9]. It is becoming increasingly obvious that these negative impacts are not being distributed equally, but fall disproportionately on those already in situations of disadvantage [10-12].

As social work begins the process of expanding its professional worldview to encompass more fully a concern with the natural environment [13], and recognition that human well-being is fundamentally and inextricably linked with environmental well-being, the role of social work education is brought into focus. It has been argued that the shift required by the profession if it is to truly embrace a green or eco-social paradigm will be dramatic and transformative [14,15]. While the such change will require shifts in all aspects of the profession, a fundamental rethinking of the nature and purpose of social work education will be crucial to this transformation.

1.1. Purpose of study

This paper discusses the increasingly visible movement to expand social work's connection to the environment and the calls for greater professional engagement in this area.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1. Participants

The key informants and supporters qualitatively come from educational curriculum developers at the Social Welfare Polytechnic, students, and alumni.

2.2. Data collection

Data were collected from participants through interviews and observation. The literature from the previous researchers was also considered in the study. Recent literature exploring greater professional engagement within social work education is presented and the role that social work education might play in promoting engagement with environmental issues and in facilitating a wider professional transformation is then discussed before exploring some of the pedagogical approaches and curriculum challenges that should be considered as part of this process. Ideas are then presented outlining what a truly transformed eco-social curriculum might look like.

2.3. Ethical consideration

This study and its findings posed no harm to the environment and there was no harm to humans as well.

2.4. A note about terminology

Several authors have noted the challenges of language when attempting to describe a social work approach that is concerned with the natural environment and its relationship to human well-being [16-18]. The terms "green," "environmental," "ecological," and "eco-social" have all been suggested and all have limitations associated with them. In reflecting on these limitations, this paper uses the phrase "eco-social" to describe an approach to social work that encompasses an understanding of ecology (i.e., recognition of the interconnected nature of all living and non-living elements) and society, and which sees human well-being as inherently and inextricably linked to a healthy and sustainable natural environment, and thus giving it green credentials.

3. Results

3.1. Social work, social work education, and the environment

At present, social work and the natural environment are the subjects of a relatively small, but rapidly growing, body of academic writing. In reviewing this body of existing literature, several authors [19,20] have emphasized the need for the profession to expand its focus beyond a narrow social orientation to recognize the importance of the non-human environment, both intrinsically and about human well-being. A valuable overview of this material is provided by Gray *et al*. [21] who identify key authors and central themes from the literature. Ramsay and Boddy [22] also offer an interesting concept analysis of environmental social work, examining published work in this field to identify its attributes and characteristics and to develop a definition of this approach to practice. Given the coverage of this body of work elsewhere, this chapter will not reproduce such a general review here.

However, several writers have also advanced the argument that social work education, as a critical component of the wider profession, needs to better integrate the natural environment into its core concerns [23-25]. Hayward *et al*. [26] noted that despite research indicating social work students and practitioners were indeed interested in issues of the environment, their experience of education and practice still reflected an individualistic or humanistic perspective. This orientation was confirmed by Harris and Boddy [27] who conducted a content analysis of Australian social work courses and concluded that "there is an overall lack of engagement in Australian social work education with content related to the natural environment."

Several examples have also now been reported of practical attempts to integrate environmental concerns into professional education [28,29]. Droplett *et al*. [30], for instance, present an account of the development of a new course on social work and sustainable social development, arising from the authors' recognition of the need to play a role in responding to environmental as well as social and economic crises. Kaiser *et al*. [31] describe using the specific issue of food justice as a lens through which social work students can learn about environmental issues and their relevance. By concentrating on this topic, the writers can draw linkages across a variety of social work program-related practice areas, methodologies, and practice levels. Another such is the online course on ecological social work that Boetto and Bell [31] established in response to their worry that social work students were not given enough opportunities to relate their field to the environment and global citizenship.

Through field education and service-learning activities, it has also been investigated how to include a deeper understanding of the environment into social work education. According to Lucas-Darby [32], a community practice course with a service-learning component featured "greening principles," where students collaborated with a chosen community to identify an environmental need or problem and create a plan for resolving it. Boetto and Bell [31] similarly report on an initiative to integrate content on the environment and climate change into a social work program by providing a field education placement in a local food relief program and found that for the students involved, the placement expanded their "perspectives about the complex interplay between climate change, food insecurity, and vulnerability."

This emerging literature on social work education and the integration of environmental content provides useful discussion and examples of how an expanded ecological orientation might be embedded within the existing structures and concerns of social work education. However, there are calls for a deeper and more profound transformation of social work education itself [33,34]. Gray and Coates (2015) provide a useful example of this view in their argument for a transformative shift in social work education toward an environmental perspective. Rather than simply looking for opportunities to insert environmental content into the traditional curriculum, Gray, and Coates [16] identify the need for a fundamental rethinking of the humanistic values and theories informing social work. These authors suggest that as well as this values shift, a transformed curriculum would encompass a theoretical framework inclusive of environmental issues, highlight a macro-role for social workers, and link these

elements with a critical understanding of policy development and implementation.

The recent literature on social work education and the environment, therefore, leads to several important observations. First, there is a clear and growing call for social work education to integrate environmental perspectives into the curriculum. Second, there is an evidence that educators are beginning to explore how this might happen in a practical sense, with new courses being developed and embedded in existing programs and approaches. And finally, there is an argument that while such initiatives are valuable and necessary, a more fundamentally transformative approach is needed – that simply "adding in" the environment to existing approaches to social work education is unlikely to produce the type of profound change required if the profession is to make a meaningful and effective contribution to moving towards a more sustainable world.

3.2. Pathways to change

Given the nature and scale of the environmental crisis, the argument for change in social work education seems very clear. The analysis of Australian social work courses conducted by Harris and Boddy [27] is, therefore, deeply concerning, indicating that there is very little content relating to the natural environment in such courses (0.43% of all social work subjects). The authors note that some of the barriers to the integration of environmental content include the issues of curriculum lag, a lack of mandated environmental content from accrediting bodies, and the impacts of neo-liberal ideology on universities in general. Harris and Boddy [27] argue that in the face of the environmental crisis, social work educators must prioritize rapid curriculum change. Yet, it is still unclear how such a change may be executed effectively and what the appropriate scope of such a change should be.

Since new and growing social challenges, practice techniques, theories, and demands from the field compete for space within current programs, social work suffers from the problem of a 'packed curriculum' [31,33]. In addition, many countries' higher education systems are being forced to follow an increasingly strict neo-liberal, managerialism agenda, which leaves educators and practitioners feeling overworked and underfunded [35,36]. In such a context, the prospect of needing to "add in" another topic may be unappealing to many social work educators.

It has previously been argued that several different pathways exist for changing the social work curriculum to reflect better an expanded professional ecological consciousness. The first of these can be referred to as the "bolt-on" approach, whereby new content is "bolted on" to the existing curriculum by adding new units or content to a degree program. The example provided by Beltran *et al*. [37] illustrates this approach. The second option could be referred to as the "embedding" approach. This pathway involves looking to embed or integrate a new content focus throughout the existing curriculum. In the case of eco-social work, this means looking for opportunities within an existing program and across the curriculum to integrate material on the values, knowledge, and skills required for an eco-social approach. Kaiser *et al*.'s [30] use of food justice as a lens to connect environmental issues with a wide range of curriculum areas is an example of this approach.

The third approach is the "transformative" option. Rather than seeking to add the eco-social perspective into the existing curriculum, this approach advocates using the foundation concepts of an eco-social approach as the fundamental basis for social work education. In other words, this approach asks what understandings, knowledge, and skills are needed to live sustainably, before exploring how the answers to this question might inform and shape the social work curriculum.

3.3. An eco-social foundation for social work education

While all three approaches discussed in the pathways to change section have the potential to improve social work education's engagement with environmental issues, there is a significant philosophical difference between the first two options and the transformative approach. Curriculum design initiatives that seek to "bolt-on" or "embed" environmental content in social work programs assume that the current philosophical foundation of those programs, and indeed of the profession, is

sound and adequate. In other words, they assume that a "business as usual" approach, with the simple addition of environmental content, will be sufficient in equipping students, and hence the profession, with the knowledge and skills required for addressing climate change and other environmental issues. However, as Coates (2003) and others have argued, the roots of social work as a profession lay in the very values and beliefs of modernity which themselves underpin the causes of the current ecological crisis. The critique of this foundation lies at the heart of Dominelli's [10] articulation of green social work and underpins her concern to ensure that environmental justice is holistic, and not an "add-on" but integral to the reconceptualization of social justice in the profession. In this manner, the approach articulated by Dominelli [10] argues that green social work should be integrated into the curriculum and that doing so creates the potential for the curriculum to be truly transformative.

Similarly, Boetto's [18] development of a transformative eco-social model for social work makes a compelling argument for fundamental change based on the recognition of this problematic philosophical foundation. Boetto [18] argues that "the profession's ontological foundations, based on modernist assumptions, are incongruent with an eco-social approach that aims to protect the natural environment." Therefore, Boetto [18] advocates for a fundamental shift of social work's current ontological and epistemological assumptions, placing recognition of "identity as the interconnectedness with nature" at the center of a transformed consideration of professional knowledge, values, ethics, and practice methods, as did Dominelli [10] previously.

Dominelli [10] and Boetto's [18] arguments have direct relevance for the development of a transformed eco-social work education. The holistic and ecological foundation from which such a curriculum might be developed must be seen as beginning with a set of eco-social concepts, from which appropriate values, knowledge, and skills can be extrapolated. While there is no clear consensus on what such a core set of concepts might include, several good starting points have been identified. Ife [(2016), for example, nominates the basic concepts of ecology as guiding principles for an ecological approach. These include holism, sustainability, diversity, equilibrium, and interdependence, again points made by green social workers [10]. Similarly, Coates [39] describes a set of five "integrative guidelines" representing the core aspects of the transformative worldview required if we are to move toward a sustainable future: Wisdom in nature, becoming, diversity, relationship in community, and change.

Dominelli [10] drew on indigenous and ecofeminist worldviews and trans disciplinarity to shift the discourses in social work's repertoire. Gray and Coates [16] suggest that a transformed social work curriculum would be guided by a set of eco-centric environmental values relating to conservation, de-growth, diversity, sustainability, spirituality, and restoration. Boetto [18] draws on eco-feminism and deep ecology as the ontological foundations for a new set of values with a focus on sustainability, including values of de-growth, collectivism, ecological justice, and global citizenship.

There will no doubt be discussion and disagreement about what exactly a core set of eco-social concepts and values for a transformed social work education might include or look like. However, the direction in which the profession needs to head is becoming increasingly clear. The movement required is away from a traditional, modernist, and anthropocentric orientation toward a set of concepts and values which are grounded in recognition of the interdependent nature of humans' relationship with the environment and oriented toward sustainability. From this transformed foundational consideration, several pedagogical approaches might arise to support and inform the development of eco-social work education as well as the actual content that such curricula might include.

3.4. Looking forward – to an eco-social curriculum

With a foundation of eco-social concepts, principles, and values, attention can be turned to the pedagogical approaches and content which could be developed and utilized in an eco-social work program. Such a shift would involve four dimensions: A fundamental shift in core foundations and orientation; the adoption of alternative pedagogical approaches; the addition of new core content; and the expansion of existing approaches and content.

3.5. Alternative pedagogies: Transformative learning and education for sustainability

Transformative learning theory represents an approach to adult learning which has clear congruencies with social work values and methods [40], and which has proven effective in efforts to expand ecological consciousness [41-43]. Based on an initial theoretical development by Mezirow [44,45], the theory argues that, through processes of socialization and acculturation, people construct meaning perspectives that act as perceptual filters through which new experiences are mediated. Transformative learning occurs when a new experience leads to critical reflection on the foundations of a person's frame of reference, revealing its inadequacies or limitations. As a consequence of this critical reflection, the person takes action to create a new, more open, inclusive, and flexible perspective. A transformative learning approach would argue that people's understanding of humans' relationship with, and place in, the natural world is often limited as a consequence of their socio-cultural context and dominant discourses (anthropocentric, individualized, patriarchal, and so on). By facilitating reflection on these existing frames of reference, the potential for transformation is created. An extensive body of literature exists on how such transformative learning can be fostered in the classroom [46,47].

In this sense, EfS critically explores existing assumptions about the content and delivery of education and the values that underpin it. Several sources have attempted to articulate the features of an EfS approach, demonstrating the broad scope that it entails [48]. Bedi and Germein [49] capture a sense of this breadth in noting that through 'embodying transformative, constructivist, and social approaches to learning, EfS aims to develop higher order thinking modes such as reflective, critical, relational, whole-of-systems, or ecological thinking.' The significance and urgency attached to implementing an EfS approach in higher education, as well as the barriers to doing so, have now been well-surveyed in the literature [50,51].

3.6. New content: Environmental education and eco-literacy

A transformed eco-social curriculum would also include some significant new areas of content. In particular, students would be expected to develop a deep understanding of the natural environment, the operation of natural systems, and humans' place in, and relationship with, the non-human world. This is a significant departure from traditional social work content. However, it is essential in a transformed eco-social approach, laying the foundation for the ontological shift described by Boetto [18], among others, away from modernist, anthropocentric perspectives and toward recognition of fundamental human interdependence with nature. This content could be introduced and supported using insights and experience from the fields of environmental education and education for eco-literacy. Environmental education [52,53] has been a feature of mainstream education systems in many Western countries for decades. Using a wide range of approaches involves equipping students with knowledge of nature and the operation of natural systems [54,55].

Connected to environmental education, but arguably manifesting a stronger critical analysis, is the approach of eco-literacy [56-58]. Recognizing the interdependent relationship between humans and the non-human world, and the urgency of the current ecological crisis, eco-literacy advocates argue that a deeper understanding of the environment, and the operation of natural systems and people's place within them, is essential if we are to move towards social and environmental sustainability. One of the main causes of the problem we are currently facing is the loss of this essential literacy and the ecological alienation that results from it. Similar to environmental education, the subject of eco-literacy has a plethora of literature and practical tools that social work educators wanting to integrate this new topic into social work curricula could draw from [59,60].

Sustainability itself will also need to be a key aspect of new content in a transformed curriculum. Aspects of sustainability as a concept are almost certainly touched on in many existing social work programs but would entail a much more focused and specific consideration in a transformed approach. Social work programs would need to commit to the focused engagement with the concept of

sustainability itself – the origins and meanings of the concept, how it might be measured and facilitated, and the range of dimensions related to it, including social, economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability [61,62].

3.7. Expanding and revising: Integrating eco-social concepts

In addition to the introduction of new content, some expansion and revision of existing curriculum areas would also be required, to reflect the new eco-social foundation. In this aspect of the transformation, opportunities to integrate eco-social content into existing curriculum material and/or to amend existing material to more fully reflect the new value base would be explored. In some content areas, this expansion will be relatively obvious and straightforward, for example, integrating material on ecological justice into an existing unit examining values and ethics in social work. In other areas, the connections may be less obvious but important and valuable. Revising a unit on child protection issues to reflect the eco-social value of holism could exemplify this. Content on practice methods, such as community development, may be expanded to include attention to specific issues such as disaster management work. The area of mental health could be expanded to explore the mental health implications of people's relationships with the environment, the biophilia hypothesis – which argues that humans have an inbuilt drive to connect with nature and environmentally based interventions such as natural therapy. Dominelli [10], Gray, Coates, and Hetherington [20], and Boetto [18] all provide examples of environmental issues and related social work practice strategies that serve to highlight areas where existing approaches to education and practice might be expanded, as indicated in Figure 1.
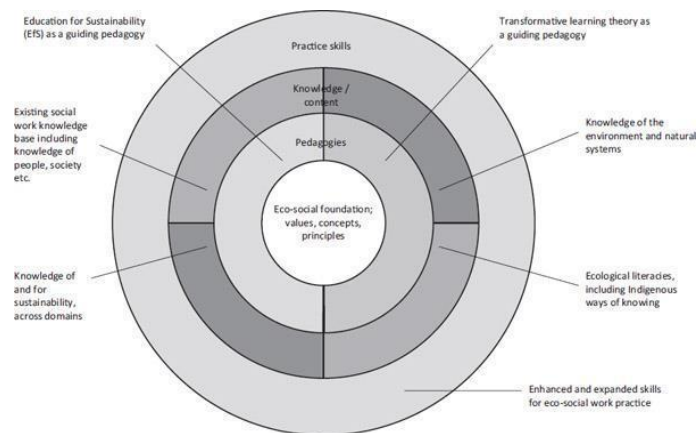

Figure 1. A green, eco-social curriculum for social work education

A transformed eco-social approach to social work education would allow much of the existing focus of social work education to be retained. For example, education about specific fields of practice such as disability, mental health, youth, families, and children will not be replaced but rather transformed through the use of a new conceptual lens. The current domains of practice, at micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels will also remain relevant, with new opportunities, strategies, and methods appearing at each of these [10]. The transformation does, however, open up the potential for important new areas of social work practice including around issues such as pollution, toxic waste disposal, food security, and climate change [20] as well as giving increased prominence to existing areas such as disaster management and response. Most significantly, shifting the foundational concepts and values for the profession creates the opportunity to look at traditional issues and practices through a new lens, one that is not shackled to old paradigm thinking, but which starts with recognizing what will be required to move toward a society characterized by greater sustainability across all dimensions.

4. Conclusion

The urgency attached to the current ecological crisis, and to the scale and impacts of climate change in particular, has not been matched by change within social work as a profession. While there is a rapidly

growing body of literature calling for the profession to expand its traditional person-in-environment perspective better to include consideration of the natural environment, there are fewer signs of this call producing actual changes at the frontlines of practice and education.

Curriculum transformation within social work education programs presents an opportunity to rapidly respond to this crisis in a way that would have significant knock-on effects throughout the profession. Such transformation will of necessity mean moving away from social work's traditional ontological and epistemological foundations and toward a set of core eco-social concepts and values that place humans' relationships with the natural world at their center. This transformed foundation, supported by appropriate pedagogical approaches, provides a basis for introducing new core content on the environment and sustainability as well as revising and expanding existing content to better reflect an eco-social orientation.

Most importantly, a transformed eco-social curriculum will help to equip future social workers with the values, knowledge, and skills required to respond effectively to what is emerging as the single biggest threat to human and environmental well-being. Green social workers are working to achieve this objective. The thinking framework in student professional practice encourages practices that uphold inclusiveness, equality, equitable distribution of resources, and uphold human rights. This curriculum encourages the acceleration of sustainable welfare development.

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