Northern Exposure: Integrating Disaster Management in a Humanitarian and Community Studies Program in the Northern Territory of Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a novel approach to preparing students for practising in situations of emergency and disaster management. The teaching approach and curriculum design uses an intensive which takes the form of an extended simulation of a disaster necessitating the establishment of a displaced persons' camp. In higher education, extended simulation is an under-utilised teaching technique that is rarely included in social work curricula. The example is given of how social work and humanitarian studies programs embed a live simulation in order to teach students disaster management competencies. This experience provides team and individual learning experiences which involve the application of practical survival skills involved in setting up sanitation systems, obtaining food and medication supplies, using four-wheel-drive vehicles and horse handling. These skills promote work readiness when students go out to work in both rural and remote communities in Australia and internationally. Principles of reflective practice, teamwork and disaster/trauma response are embedded in a "community of learning" model. The implications for teaching and learning are outlined.

INTRODUCTION

The role of social work in natural and man-made disasters is a new area that is being incorporated into the social work education curriculum to deal with the impact of climate change and the increasing incidence of other civil emergencies. How the disaster management curriculum integrates with existing social work programs is under-reported, with a modular approach usually adopted as an "add on" to existing social work teaching. Usually the competencies required for disaster management work build on existing social work competencies, but there are practical skills that are also required in areas such as information technology, community preparedness training, teamwork and communication across sectors (Ng, 2012). These practical skills are required also in rural and remote locations where under-resourcing features and there are impediments due to the natural landscape. For example, one lesson from the aftermath of severe earthquakes is that motor vehicles are unable to be driven due to the lack of adequate roads and liquefaction. In such contexts the only way of travelling across country may be on horseback or by foot over rugged terrain. As the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand in February 2011 illustrated, social workers were needed to work alongside police with grieving families whose loved ones were missing following the earthquake. In such situations the relational aspects of social work are considered to be of critical importance (van Heugten, 2013). Place and context are pivotally important; some parts of the world have a natural readiness for disaster planning due to their climate and history of disasters.

Darwin's location in northern Australia, with its proximity to Indonesia and South East Asia, has enabled it to be a base for responses to international disaster and humanitarian aid efforts. Its proximity to Bali and the terrorist activity there in the near past has established links with the Royal Darwin Hospital's Trauma Centre where many victims of the Bali bombings were treated. It is an area that has experienced various man-made disasters in the recent past which have included: oil rig explosions, boating/shipping accidents and a Japanese invasion during World War Two. In a similar way to other rural locations in Australia that regularly contend with climate-based emergencies such as drought and bush fires (Anderson, 2009; Brown & Green, 2009), natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones are common in the region. Climate change will demand an increase the humanitarian and disaster response nationally in the future (Rowlands, 2013). Darwin and the surrounding region experiences regular tropical cyclones and there is the possibility of increased volcanic and seismic activity in Indonesia. Advanced planning for disaster and for working in the aftermath have been recommended in the disaster management curricula due to the impact of climate change (Ali, Hatta, & Azman, 2014; Smith, Lees, & Clymo, 2003).

Darwin has a military presence to respond to such incidents. In 2011 following a visit to Darwin from President Obama, an agreement was made that Australia would host a US military presence at the existing defence base at Robinson Barracks in preparedness for international emergencies. This new development is further evidence of the need to train, develop and up-skill the humanitarian and disaster management workforce in the region. The humanitarian program, therefore, has strategic geopolitical positioning and significance, with a regional emphasis on strengthening communities in preparation for

emergencies. In this context, the aim is to establish a trained pool of graduates to assist in risk reduction, emergency response and community recovery, both nationally and internationally. The humanitarian course is positioned and designed to build personal resilience in a dual pathway for graduates where they can choose to work in case and community work in remote Australian communities, to assist in disaster preparedness and recovery, and/or in international aid delivery. The program aims to equip graduates with the competencies to work effectively in a variety of humanitarian disasters. The Bachelor of Humanitarian and Community Studies program is a three-year undergraduate degree located and taught at Charles Darwin University (CDU), on the Casuarina campus (Darwin) and Katherine (Mataranka) campuses in the Northern Territory (NT). The degree is unique in Australia, and was developed alongside the four-year Bachelor of Social Work degree, sharing academic teaching resources and an overarching philosophy of social justice and human rights frameworks (Ife, 2012). Educational preparation in the humanitarian degree centres on the physical location of Darwin in NT. In this location, skills may be required to deal with extreme circumstances when natural and man-made disasters strike without warning.

THE CURRICULUM WITHIN THE LOCAL NT CONTEXT

Darwin is the government-designated disaster/trauma response centre for the South East Asian region and, as such, is called upon to respond to many different types of emergencies including man-made (for example, terrorist activity, war) and natural disasters. The School of Health Science, in which the social work and community studies department is situated, has disaster/trauma response allocated as a priority and is in the process of developing a research institute in conjunction with the Royal Darwin Hospital's Trauma Centre.

Within this local context, the social work, and humanitarian studies programs offered at Charles Darwin, are designed to be practical, action-based and learner-focused to meet the needs of a workforce which includes social workers and community and humanitarian workers practising in NT and beyond. Traditionally, NT is home to some of the most remote and under-resourced communities in Australia and has the largest concentrations of Aboriginal people living within the state (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, 2008). Secondly, Darwin and the surrounding areas are the first points of entry to many asylum seekers who enter Australia in the hope of integrating into a society which will treat them more justly than the homelands which they have left behind. They typically have personal experience of war, oppressive political systems and poverty. To prepare social workers and humanitarian workers for the complex environment in which they will practise, one of the primary aims of the programs is to encourage personal resilience amongst students. This is needed to equip students to deal with the practical realities of the outback, including the harsh climatic conditions they are likely to face in NT conditions: areas of desert, extreme heat and humidity, cyclones and flooding due to monsoonal rains. Secondly, the programs aim to prepare students to cope with a variety of contexts for practice including rural and remote environments. Shared units of study across the disciplines of humanitarian studies and social work are designed to prepare students to work in communities which face extreme climatic conditions and to work with individuals and groups from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These are populations displaced by disasters or emergency situations and experiencing poverty and under-resourcing in rural and remote locations.

As two disciplines work together, they have the opportunity to explore synergies across social work and humanitarian disciplines.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

These programs derive from community engagement models. Social work's connections with emergency and disaster management have been more recently added to the programs with course approval for a new master's level degree in emergency and disaster management. To update knowledge between humanitarianism, social work and disaster preparedness and management, a literature review was undertaken by the author from an internet search with keywords ("disaster OR bushfire OR flood* OR earthquake OR drought OR cyclone OR tsunami OR climate change AND social work". The themes of this literature review are presented below.

Social work's involvement in disasters is connected with a variety of activities including the assessment of individuals groups and families and the linking of people to the resources they need to prevent longer term psycho-social difficulties (Ali et al., 2014). Social workers in Bangladesh have been involved in educating the population about preparing for disasters so their efforts are in the areas of awareness raising and prevention as well as helping during, and in the aftermath of, disasters (Ali et al., 2014). Cross-disciplinary and inter-sectorial collaboration/communication are other areas in which social workers working with displaced populations require competency (Drolet, Ginsberg, Samuel, & Larson, 2012; Smith et al., 2003). The experience of working in partnership with social services in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the days after 9/11 highlighted for the researchers the desire of volunteers and practitioners to work together but, paradoxically, groups were reluctant and wary of one another due to differences between statutory and voluntary roles and tasks (Smith et al., 2003, pp. 522–523). Van Heugten (2013) and Marlowe and Lou (2013), writing about social work roles in the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, concurred with these findings. Cultural issues and lack of sensitivity often hampered social workers' efforts to help. For example, refugee groups in Christchurch were found to fare better in the aftermath of the devastation when they had a leader from within their ethnic grouping who was able to strongly advocate for them (Marlowe & Lou, 2003, pp. 60–61).

Under difficult working conditions in the Christchurch post-earthquake era, van Heugten (2013, pp. 38–39) found that social workers assisting the collective effort in the national state of emergency as first-line responders were put under various forms of stress. Some sources of this stress were due to moral dilemmas faced by social workers stretched to the limits of their functional efficiency during situations of emergency. Challenges in such situations include the allocation of scarce resources, poor working conditions and increased workload coupled with the need to manage intense expressed emotions from colleagues and clients. In the aftermath of the Christchurch earthquakes, for example, van Heugten (2013) discovered that social workers faced a host of practical problems with road access, increased workloads, complex ethical dilemmas over *how* to help, and conflict between individual and organisational practice values. Under such conditions social workers reported increased

fatigue, lowered physical immunity with frequent colds and flus and few acknowledgements from management for a job well done (van Heugten, 2013, p.38).

Those workers who developed the ability to bounce back and use resilience under such difficult conditions had managers who provided supportive environments based on shared values and integrated these into workplace processes (van Heugten, 2013, p. 43). Similarly, the concern shown for staff was important in maintaining a collegiality and generosity of spirit in a crisis has been mentioned in other studies (for example, Mason, 2011).

Few social workers are trained as emergency and disaster professionals. Therefore, when the earthquake in February 2011 occurred causing the death of 185 persons, few were adequately prepared for entering a state of civil emergency (van Heugten, 2013, p. 43). The literature suggests that those professionals who are adequately prepared for the likely scenarios they will face during and after a disaster are more likely to cope with the various pressures (Ali, Hatta, & Azman, 2014). Hence the building of resilience is thought best accomplished with exposure to likely scenarios and being taught practical coping and survival skills (Marlowe & Lou, 2013). Regular debriefing and follow-up for social workers after the helping effort in a crisis is over are also needed (Ali Hatta, & Azman 2014).

We have endeavoured to embed these kinds of competencies in the design of our curricula to prepare students for the rigors of disaster and emergency work. We attempt to immerse students in those hypothetical situations in which they will experience the moral dilemmas common in humanitarian and community work. I now move on to explore the content of the program in greater detail. The following section also aims to highlight how the program aligns with the themes from the international literature on social work and the importance of the local context in managing emergencies and disasters among ethnically diverse populations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE

There are three major influences on teaching in the Darwin and the Northern Territory location. The first is the geographical: the tropical climate and landscape within which Charles Darwin University is sited. The second is the challenge of operating within an infrastructure of reduced resourcing and the unique demographic profile of its residents: predominantly male and under the age of 45 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Thirdly, similar to other regional universities in Australia, the boundaries between academia and industry are fluid and the partnership between local businesses and the university produces collaboration and creativity. Alston (2007) found that these kinds of contextual factors also shaped the social work program at Charles Sturt University due to its inland rural location in rural New South Wales, an area which is prone to drought and under-resourcing. As a consequence the priority is to teach social work with a human rights and social justice framework which is seen by Alston (2007) as "a natural extension of our constant exposure to disadvantage and human rights abuses in our rural contexts" (Alston, 2007, pp. 3–4).

The Bachelor of Humanitarian and Community Studies degree provides a variety of electives that can be studied across the two degree programs aiming to equip students in the beginning competencies for working with communities and displaced populations

in situations of emergency and disaster. For example, the degree has introduced specialist units which teach practical skills for establishing aid camps for displaced populations, co-ordinating aid agencies and project management for working with under-resourced, Aboriginal, and refugee communities.

The Bachelor of Humanitarian Studies has now moved into postgraduate development due to its wide appeal to a variety of professional groups. Using a communities of learning approach (Wenger, 2002), the program has incorporated agencies and practitioners working in the human services in NT to enable the university to respond to local and industry needs. As units are taught in blended and flexible modes of delivery, culturally responsive technology aims to develop an on-line community of learners using interactive methods. The challenge is to create the community of learning, as McLoughlin points out, with students from multiple cultural backgrounds and learning styles when on-line learning constitutes a culture of its own (McLoughlin, 1999, p. 234).

The Northern Territory offers unique practicum experiences for working in rural and remote areas as well as those affected by emergency situations or regional disasters. In working in these areas under a clinical supervisor during the two practicum placements, students are encouraged to put into practice some of the principles of humanitarian aid work that are embedded in the teaching units. This pedagogical approach is prefaced on a social justice/rights-based framework and underpinned by an ethic of care for individuals, groups and communities. A context-based teaching approach works well with experiences of offering humanitarian aid. This is why lecturers emphasise the need to explore social problems and issues broadly in collaboration with local families and communities rather than following an "expert-knows-best" model. Learning and assessment activities, therefore, aim to encourage students to work collaboratively on issues that have no simple answers, the experience of which brings a "real world" experience of working in a multi-disciplinary team but in a supervised and supportive environment. The alumni of the program support current students as mentors in their employing agencies so the community of learning grows as the program graduates more students year by year. The numbers of enrolling students has grown exponentially over the years, from eight students in 2008 to 121 in 2010.

Other themes guiding the Humanitarian Studies degree are multi-disciplinary practice, working with refugee and aboriginal communities, both in Australia and internationally. Upon graduation following the three-year degree, students are eligible to join the Australian Institute for Welfare and Community Workers for training resources to support their ongoing professional development. At that stage, students have the practical skills and theoretical grounding for working as beginning practitioners in humanitarian aid and under-resourced environments.

PROGRAM THEMES RELEVANT TO HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Ng (2012) highlights the importance of social workers dealing with disaster populations learning how to conduct comprehensive needs assessments, a role shared with the social work curriculum. In emergency and disaster management, this is conceptualised as a shared

responsibility with other disaster responders across governmental and non-governmental contexts (Ng, 2012, p. 542). Alongside these skills, individual assessment and therapeutic techniques are considered crucial for recovery. This is evidenced in the increased incidence of gendered violence post-disaster drawing from the experience of increased post-earthquake incidence of domestic violence in Haiti and Christchurch (True, 2013).

The key content themes identified by the Course Advisory Group for further development and embedded strategically in the program are social justice, cultural diversity, remote placement practice and disaster/trauma response training. This strategy still complements the ACWA core competencies, all of which are blended into course units. These are:

1. Practise in an ethical and professional manner;

2. Use appropriate communication;

3. Assess plans, projects and work with clients/community;

4. Implement programs, projects, and work with clients/community;

5. Manage plans and organise both autonomously and as part of a team;

6. Use personal attributes appropriately;

7. Use awareness of societal structures and systems in work with clients.

(Australian Community Workers' Association [ACWA], 2011).

Through field placements students are required to provide evidence of their ability to work with individuals, families, and groups. Competencies for working with communities as "clients" are also assessed, and with the support of the new unit SWK365, Integrated Methods in Humanitarian Practice, the capacity to integrate placement experience with classroom learning has been enhanced. This unit explores working across disciplines and sectors to conceptualise emergency response as a shared responsibility considered to be a key competency in the field of disaster management (Ng, 2012).

Social justice and cultural diversity are required components in any humanitarian welfare program, however, these competencies has been made more explicit in the CDU program which is in keeping with the needs of the Northern Territory and the strategic focus of the university. Social justice and rights-based practice is also linked to the theme of remote practice which provides practitioners with some unique challenges in terms of equitable and appropriate service delivery (Ife, 2012). These themes run through every unit but are also reinforced with dedicated units where assumptions and beliefs embedded in professional practice can be critiqued and challenged. For example, critical reflection is embedded in the learning activities of the units: Communication Skills, Social Policy, and Skills for Remote Practice. In these units, social work and humanitarian students interact in the same classes in which they identify some of the similarities and differences in their professional roles and codes of practice.

A specialist elective in Dynamics of Loss and Grief addresses issues involved in working with the recovery of communities in the emergency and disaster management field. Future planning will work toward specialist electives in humanitarian engineering and the medical aspects of disaster. These electives at postgraduate level will enable students to enrol in a master's degree in emergency and disaster management while taking a graduate unit in social work focused on working with displaced communities.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACH

The Bachelor of Humanitarian and Community Studies program challenges students to examine their own values and beliefs in order to develop a professional approach to welfare that mirrors the emotional intelligence competencies required of social workers under Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) competency requirements. Community and humanitarian work practice is underpinned by social justice and the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) Code of Ethics.

Case management in disasters involves assessment of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression in populations as well as suicidal ideation (Ng, 2012). These competencies place in sharp relief one's own values for practice. Emotional intelligence and interpersonal competencies also underpin the student's ability to recognise, understand and challenge practices and structures that contribute to social inequity based in cultural difference, communication patterns, power and authority, political structures and knowledge development. In the context of emergency and disaster management, students are also alerted to key issues such as questioning power relationships in society, the impact of colonisation and political systems to attend to the welfare of displaced populations and marginalised groups in society.

Students are supported in the early years of their training to develop skills for information retrieval, use of technology and critical reflection within a social work and project management framework. This early skill development lays the foundation for later years when students are expected to develop (and are assessed on) their ability to apply this knowledge in self-directed learning and professional practice. The use of online discussion boards provides opportunities for critical reflection on the skills needed in remote or disaster service and, in particular, the role of technology in communicating in remote service delivery and during and following disasters.

The program is action oriented and, therefore, expects students to engage in activities and exercises both individually and in teams (single profession and multi-disciplinary). A key component of assessment throughout the program is on developing professionally appropriate participation and engagement in the practice setting.

THE FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

A core element of the accredited humanitarian training is the completion of two placements in an agency context. These two practicum placements are designed to provide students with a broad range of experience with learning opportunities from both the government and non-government sectors and direct (clinical) and indirect (policy/research) fields of practice. Within the objectives of this course the placements are focused toward remote and international

cross-cultural welfare work. However, we have found that in the context of fieldwork in remote, international and cross cultural contexts, a longer (70-day) practicum is required, due to the complexity of these contexts and the need to promote "deep learning" (Ramsden, 2003). I now move on to provide an example of this deepening of learning in the remote project experience unit which is taught as an intensive.

AN EXTENDED SIMULATION: ESTABLISHING A DISPLACED PERSONS' CAMP POST-DISASTER

SWK260 Remote Project experience

Based in both Casuarina Campus and Mataranka station (400km south of Darwin) the SWK260 remote project experience is a unique feature of this course. It embeds technical skills in which students pass vocational certificates (such as in quad-bike and four–wheel-drive management, alongside learning to apply theories of practice. Among the many practical skills taught are horse riding and basic mechanics. This unit attracts 20 credit points which is reflective of its residential requirement and hours within the intensive. The mode of delivery allows for total immersion in an extended simulation of a terrorist attack on a community. The intensive promotes, trains and provides practical experience in ethics, professionalism, communication(s), planning, project work, client needs, team work, advocacy, and the appropriate use of self as a humanitarian worker.

This core intensive unit is a two-week intensive of approximately 50 hours' study per week with the final week being "live in". Students set up in an outback bush camp simulating a poor, isolated environment assisting a displaced community, when in reality they are on a remote NT cattle station. Here in the mud, dust, and flies complete with drop latrines, students are given the project of designing a 15,000 displaced persons quarantine camp. It is hard work and a stressful placement designed to assist students to cognitively and physically manage the emotional and practical pressures of humanitarian and disaster work.

At the same time, the intensive enables students to master basic technical skills in mechanics, water sanitation, energy supply, equestrian management, radio communications and four-wheel-drive maintenance. Students are assessed on their capacity to work and learn as a small team experiencing the stress and discomforts of a resource-poor environment akin to a realistic humanitarian mission during and post-disaster.

The unit is akin to a field placement as it is offered under the co-supervision and assess-ment of a skilled consultant from Medicins Sans Frontieres. Students are assigned as teams and work as groups to complete very complex tasks in the field. These involve organising, troubleshooting, community work, and humanitarian design. It is the only unit in Australia that prepares students for the welfare management of a large displaced-persons camp. This unit has been developed as a simulation in preparation for the huge population dislocations that will likely occur with global climate change.

Cross-cultural competencies (CALD)

Cultural sensitivity in dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations post-disaster has been highlighted in the recovery phase (Marlowe & Lou, 2013). For

example, there has been recommendation that workers learn to work across cultures with leaders of ethnic communities who can communicate more effectively with their own people in their own languages (Marlowe & Lou, 2013). In all humanitarian and community placements we ensure there is a significant measure of cross-cultural experience and a balance of welfare/community development work combined with the technical skilling competencies in community recovery and humanitarian logistics. Every placement has a combination of at least two separate projects which are assessed.

All fieldwork supervisors work in an accredited agency and are qualified with over two years' working experience in the humanitarian field. However, due to remoteness and potential security issues, students may have one overall supervisor who may be supported by other supervisors from specialist aid and humanitarian organisations.

All placements contain components of client contact, technical projects, group, and community work and some administration/research. Charles Darwin University is committed to ensuring that graduates are "work ready" for both the international humanitarian field and/or for the community and welfare requirements of remote Australian and Asia/Pacific human service work. To this end, substantial efforts are made to ensure the student placement experience prepares students for the disaster management and humanitarian aid workforce by realistic activities with real-life relevance.

STRATEGIES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Drawing from the concepts of emotional intelligence (Howe, 2008), and critical-reflective practice (Fook & Askeland, 2007) in the social work literature, students consider how to manage their own wellbeing through self-awareness and peer support to maximise their professional effectiveness. Emotional intelligence includes the "ability to use emotion to improve [their] reasoning" (Howe, 2008, p. 16). In this framework, students develop competencies to identify their own emotions, the process by which they arise, and the skills to moderate emotions and personal responses when working with clients and communities to build resilience. Therefore resilience, or the ability to rebound in situations of stress and trauma, is a key competency in both social and humanitarian work (Mandleco & Peery, 2000). Resilience is practically modelled and built in the curriculum which offers pre-placement preparation, clinical supervision and post-placement debriefing. This preparation and support is acknowledged as being just as critical as the competencies (i.e., emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills and reflective thinking). Confident beginning practitioners tend to be more resilient to stress (Grant & Kinman, 2011, 2012). For example, in recent research, high levels of psychological distress were found among social work students, highlighting the need for educators to build learning activities into the curriculum that support and enhance existing skills to act as protective factors in times of psychological stress (Grant & Kinman, 2011, 2012).

Adopting empathy for others and working towards altruistic goals of a more just society are an important part of this resilience. Students require these competencies to work from a secure base in order to learn to challenge systems on behalf of disenfranchised groups in society. As educators Grant and Kinman's (2011, 2012) research found, building sound

communications skills, self-efficacy and confidence underlies resilience and wellbeing for social work students embarking on their fieldwork education (Grant & Kinman, 2011). The social support networks between social workers and humanitarian students, teaching staff and alumni of the two programs, builds a community of learning that constitutes its own support system. Clinical supervision and peer support enable opportunities for critical reflection by allowing students the opportunity to discuss anxiety safely. This emotional support is a springboard to dealing with anxiety about the many ambiguous situations they are likely to encounter in humanitarian and social work when practising with under-resourced, marginalised and displaced groups in society.

While delivering human services into remote environments, our placements are rigorously supported by sponsoring aid agencies and opportunities for workforce development of fieldwork educators are maximised. Graduates are prepared to be working in potentially dangerous humanitarian environments through the individualised two-placement program which is tailored to each student's learning objectives. Critical incident stress management training is integral to the preparation for fieldwork, as is debriefing during and following the critical events that may be encountered in humanitarian fieldwork.

Practice and activism as themes in disaster and emergency management
The complex and often ambiguous situations in which humanitarian and disaster management work is undertaken cannot give rise to simple models due to the very nature of the work. This makes the teaching and learning difficult to structure as undergraduate students tend to want to know the "answers" when there are no easy solutions. In response to simulations of humanitarian dilemmas post-disaster, students are asked to apply guiding principles, including what it means to be part of the establishment and maintenance of a just society in which the rights of individuals and groups are upheld. Therefore, in the teaching of disaster and emergency recovery, one of the main objectives is to develop learning tasks that require students to discover the principles that are ethical guides to action. Secondly, the task is to ask students to assess whether and how far these models fit the contexts in which they are actually working within on practicum, or as simulations. These contexts are likely to be culturally bound to some extent and so the application of theory to practice requires them to consider which theories need to be applied in some cultural contexts and not others as well as which theories or principles are more widely applicable. Summarising these kinds of debates in the disaster literature serves to generate discussion amongst students about what "good" practice looks like, and, in turn, suggests which models are appropriate to be applied across a range of diverse contexts.

In this synthesis we are hoping to model possibilities of social work and disaster management professionals working together as agents of social change. Students learn that change is not only possible but that they, too, can be agents working towards social change. To support this reflection, students are involved in a blend of social justice, and community action projects. Such an eclectic approach facilitates critical thinking in both humanitarianism and social work and will inspire independent thinking.

The humanitarian philosophy of social work sees part of the role as challenging structural inequality. In this way, the blending of a human service role with an activist humanitarian

philosophy promotes change through documenting private ills as being grounded in public issues. Remote human service work needs to address the issues that operate to exclude, isolate and marginalise sectors of the community, thus a humanitarian philosophy helps to bridge this practice–activism divide between social work and disaster management (West & Baschiera, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This article has identified that there are significant benefits in incorporating a mix of theory, technical skills, simulation and reflective practice in curriculum development to prepare students for dealing with disasters and their wake. The article has explored how both social work and disaster management can be complementary as they have similar professional competencies and can be practically applied to assist the local community under extreme conditions. Competencies for disaster management have been identified as assessment, communication, community education, social and mental health interventions, and emergency relief, mobilisation and co-ordination (Ng, 2012).

Features of disaster management include the need to teach students about the emotional legacy and impact of engagement with trauma and traumatised people in emergencies and disasters. In the experience of remote disaster management simulations and practicum fieldwork experiences, students develop capabilities and personal coping skills which include emotional intelligence and resilience. Practising respectfully with people in their diverse contexts is central to demonstrating cultural competence (Mason, 2011). Cultural competency during disasters goes beyond age, gender and ethnicity to a deeper understanding of the importance of relationship and attachment to place (Mason, 2011, p. 385). The partnership of humanitarian and disaster management studies and the social work profession offers a wider knowledge base for the development of new knowledge and data to influence evidence-informed practice (Edmond, Megivern, Williams, Rochman, & Howard, 2006). Both the social work profession and humanitarian/disaster management programs offer unique learning opportunities including exploration of the complex cultural diversity of northern Australia.

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