

Growing resilience in health and mental health social workers: innovation in student practice learning, education and post-qualifying development



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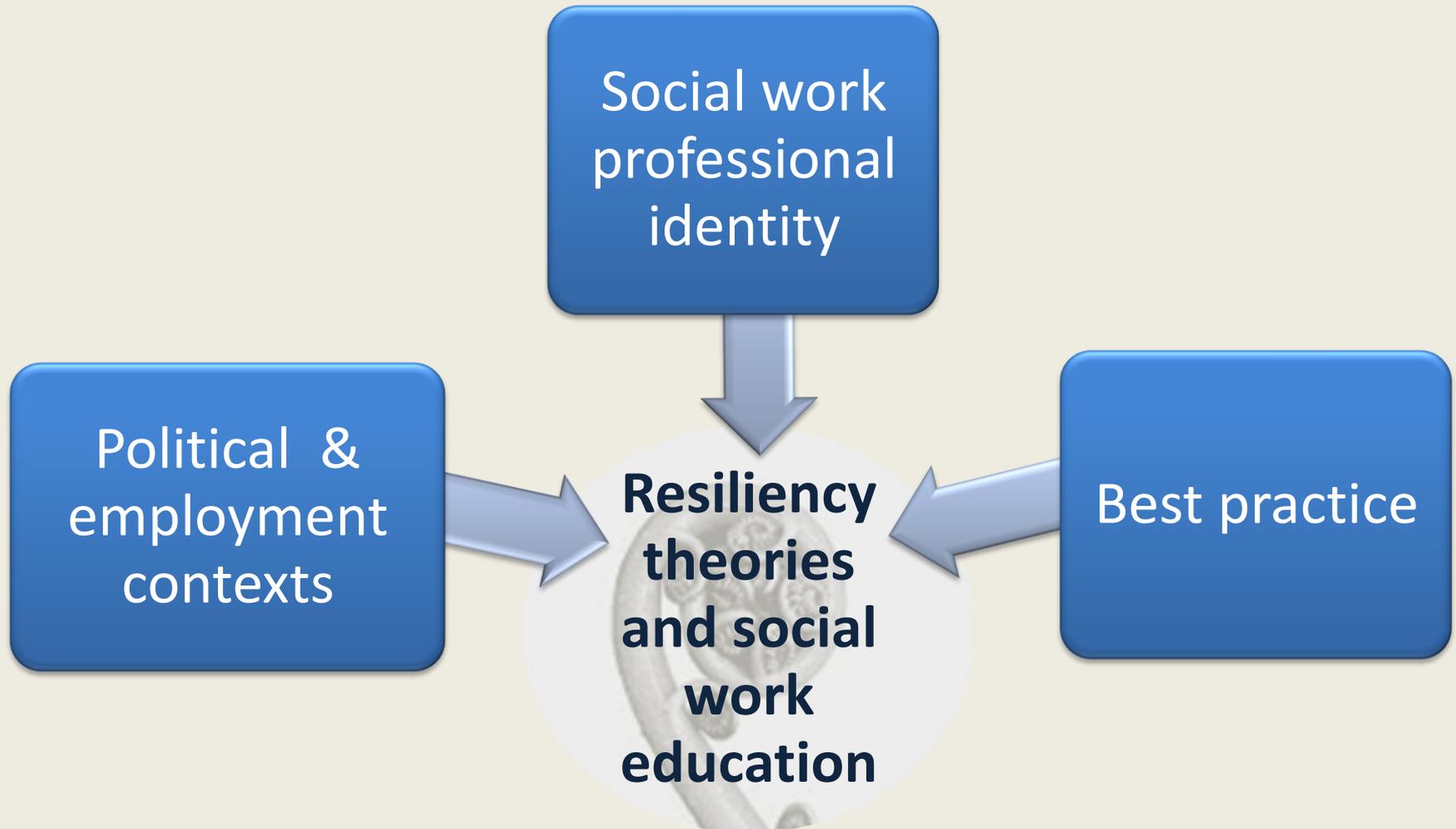
Goals of presentation

Key issue:

creating the curriculum that best supports the development of resilient practitioners

- The rationale for incorporating resiliency theories
- Key principles from the resilience literature
- Resilience in the curriculum

Why focus on resilience in social work education?



Political and employment contexts

[Social work graduates need to demonstrate] ‘independent critical judgement’, alongside the facility to work in much more innovative ways, for example through ‘a fully developed capacity to take responsibility for the use of reflection and critical analysis’ and through the ability ‘to work creatively and effectively ... in a context of risk, uncertainty, conflict and contradiction’.

GSCC, 2005:19–20

The employing environment (state, society and the employer) requires social workers to be robust and emotionally sophisticated



Workplace stress and resilience

Organisational implications:

recruitment, retention, sustainability of standards/knowledge transfer

Occupational health implications:

Morale, stress levels, burnout, workplace relationships
(EWCO, 2005; Occupational Safety & Health Service, 2003)

Emotional resilience ‘has clear implications for individuals’ adaptive capacities under conditions of environmental stress, conflict or uncertainty’

(Klohen 1996:1068, in Collins, 2007:256)



Social work identity in a changing world

In contemporary social work, with an emphasis on best value, economy, efficiency and effectiveness, the centrality of relationship and emotion is neglected

Collins (2007:257)

Hugman (2009) challenges social work's current micro-level, agency-based identity. Brookfield (2009) argues that critical reflection is essential in order to reveal sources of inequality and power.

Lymbery (2003; Eadie & Lymbery, 2007) describes the professional development of a social worker as moving from a competent to a creative stance and from dealing with predictable situations to uncertainty and complexity.



Best practice and resilience

Resiliency theories strongly resonate with best practice in current social work, e.g. Strengths-based practice and a recovery focus

... theoretical emphasis has shifted from resilience as solely individual traits to notions of adaptation despite multiple and cumulative risks and to understanding protective factors for buffering or mediating effects of adversity.

Bottrell (2009:323)

Historical development



Coping with the 'messy complexities' of practice

Burgess (2004) and Askeland & Fook (2009) stress the need to develop critically reflexive practitioners for what Butler et al (2007:285) term '***the messy complexities of practice***' that require as much emphasis on process as outcome.

What principles can we apply from resiliency theories?



Growing resilient practitioners:

Key principles from resiliency theories

Personal, relational and environmental elements:

- Resilience is not just an individual trait but an adaptation and response to complexity (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Ungar, 2004 & 2008).
- Environmental supports for resilience - commitment to examining underlying processes that affect vulnerability and protective factors (Bottrell, 2009).
- Emphasis on strengths as well as deficits – shift from pathogenic to salutogenic stance (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).
- Resilience not a static concept – coping with adversity means dynamic planning for the unpredictable in social work.



Resiliency and the curriculum:

- Students' awareness of resiliency factors – focus on emotional intelligence, positive emotions & reflective abilities (Clare, 2007).
- Attention to effective coping skills made in consideration of the ecology in which they are practiced.
- Students' resilience assessed according to their developmental level - their development may also be inhibited by structural or relational barriers (Bottrell, 2009; Brown & Bourne, 1996).
- Integration of learning across all aspects of the curriculum
- Teaching and assessment should be geared towards reflective and integrative functions (Bellinger, 2010a&b).
- Emphasis on self-directed learning & transformative education – towards sustainability of practice.
- Positive re-appraisal and solution focused work – can be developed in tutorial and in supervision.



Does the curriculum develop resilient practitioners?

Social Work Theory and Method

Communication skills

Sociology, Policy and Law

Culture & identity

Psychology and Human Development

Practicum

The traditional social work curriculum:

- social work education is modelled on traditional, Western professional education
- field education/practice learning is a separate (and sometimes marginalised) stream
- academic attainment is privileged within university-shaped degrees that favour scholarship over integration
- assessment is modular & hierarchical, with no in-built emphasis on integrative opportunities
- knowledge is deductive and potentially de-contextualised

One model for change

An integrative curriculum with reflective practice at its core



Key features of a resilience-informed degree:

- integration of self, context and process
- student learning integrated through personal/professional development in practice learning
- clear enunciation of learning stages throughout degree

Staying resilient: making the post-qualifying transition

Focus on transferable knowledge and practice

- Reflective skills, e.g. PD portfolios
- Reflexive analysis – staying in touch with the bigger picture
- Organisational responsibility to recognise the person within the professional (Jack & Donnellan, 2010)
- Structural and systemic support for ongoing development of supervision skills



Supervision & resiliency theories

Effective supervision [...] can delay or mitigate the effects of detrimental factors and can contribute to positive outcomes for workers in social service organizations.

Mor Barak et al (2009:25)

Supervision as a site for facilitating reflection for individual development within a relational space – e.g. managing emotions and uncertainty, kindling hope

Beddoe (2010)



The koru



- New beginnings, growth and harmony - Ka hinga atu he tete-kura, ka hara-mai he tete-kura (*as one fern frond (person) dies - one is born to take its place*)
- Sustainability
 - Taonga Tuku Iho (*treasures allowed or handed down*)



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