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Social justice: Alive and well (partly) in social work practice?

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Abstract
This research with social work practitioners explores ways in which social justice ideas are reflected at different levels of social work practice. Social justice is actively drawn on in practice, but primarily at the level of daily practice and is less actively utilized at the macro level of change.

Keywords
daily practice, levels of practice, professional, social justice, social work

Introduction

There is a substantial academic literature on the nature of social justice and on the relationship between social justice and social work, and between social justice and social policy (see Ife, 2001; Craig, 2002; Sowers and Rowe, 2007; and Reisch, 2002, for useful examples). In that literature, there is extensive debate about both the meaning and nature of the term 'social justice' and about such key elements as the relationships between fairness and equality and the meaning of those terms, between rights and responsibilities, and about the role of the state in creating and supporting social justice. (Interested readers will find many of the issues well covered in Craig et al., 2008, and in Reisch, 2002; an exhaustive review of the literature is beyond the scope of this article). The key dimensions of social justice are well captured by Craig in his contribution to the special edition of the

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British Journal of Social Work (*BJSW*) in 2002; these dimensions are central to this author's thinking about the nature of social justice. Social justice, he argues, is:

> a framework of political objectives, pursued through social, economic, environmental and political policies, based on an acceptance of difference and diversity, and informed by values concerned with: achieving fairness, and equality of outcomes and treatment; recognising the dignity and equal worth and encouraging the self-esteem of all; the meeting of basic needs; maximizing the reduction of inequalities in wealth, income and life chances; and the participation of all, including the most disadvantaged. (Craig, 2002: 671–2)

Craig's focus here is, rightly, primarily on the policy and political dimensions of social justice. For social work practitioners, those dimensions need to be translated into their daily practice, a translation which has had little attention in the social work literature where the emphasis has been on either the values and principles of social justice or the ways in which those values and principles form a context for practice, as distinct from being an integral part of that practice. Lundy (2004) captures this relationship between the broad principles and their application clearly in her discussion about translating the broad values into deeds on a daily basis. Her work provides a very useful and thoughtful discussion on the relationship between social work and social justice.

While there is no universally-agreed definition of the term or its application, 'social justice' has long been considered a core part of social work, arguably the core part of its value base. Most national ethical codes include the words 'social justice' somewhere within their ethical statements,[1] while the International Code of Ethics says quite specifically that 'social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work' (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2009: 2; see also Reisch, 2002). In its definition of social work, the IFSW says that: 'principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work' (IFSW, 2009).

Social justice provides an integral element in the work of a range of social work authors and commentators as they describe the nature of social work (Ife, 2001; Craig, 2002; Reisch, 2002; Figueira-McDonough, 2007; Sowers and Rowe, 2007; Smith, 2008). While the various international codes, the international definition, and much of the literature emphasize social justice as a/the key value and the pursuit of social justice as a/the fundamental component of social work practice, literature in recent years has suggested that this dimension of social work is weakening and is much

less apparent in both the practice of social workers and in the public voice of social workers and their professional associations and organizations (*BJSW*, 2002; Chu et al., 2009; Ferguson, 2008; Solas, 2008a, b).

The concern about the declining public voice and reduced focus on social justice is, in part at least, reflected in what some commentators see as a growing focus on individualism and individualization, and on what might be termed, perhaps a little loosely, 'therapeutic interventions'. In that focus, it is suggested, the broader social justice and social change dimensions of social work are being pushed into the background by a narrow emphasis on professionalism and by a narrow form of postmodernism in which identity is separated from its social and economic contexts and by the impact of globalization and new public management (Dominelli, 2004; Lovelock et al., 2004; Payne, 2006; Payne and Askeland, 2008). Those concerns, it is argued, are being replaced by managerially-determined activities and by narrow attention to the needs and interests of individuals and their families without locating these needs and interests in a wider context. In that narrow attention, the wider economic, social, cultural and ideological considerations which shape the lives and experiences of so many social work users are at worst ignored or at best given little more than scant and passing consideration, both by individual practitioners and, perhaps more significantly, by the wider professional bodies. ('Users' is preferred here rather than 'clients' or 'consumers'.)

There is, then, much to support an argument that the social work/social justice link seems tenuous, or at least under significant strain. However, most of the criticism and concern about the declining interest in and attention to social justice has centred on what is perceived to be a weaker voice by social workers (individually and, more notably, collectively) in public policy. In making those judgements, almost no attention has been given to how practitioners describe their own values and how (or if) those values are translated into their daily practice. (Hawkins et al. [2001] provide something of an exception to this in their work with practitioners and students.) Swenson (1998) demonstrates ways in which social justice can be part of individual casework practice, but her interesting article is an essay rather than being based on data gathered from practitioners as is the case here. Beginning on the assumption that social justice is an integral part of social work, the project on which this article is based undertook preliminary exploration of social workers' own definitions of social justice, the influences on their approach to and thinking about social justice, their prioritization of a range of dimensions of social justice and the social justice and social work practice links made by the practitioners.

There are, of course, important empirical difficulties in self-descriptions and self-assessment of work and professional practice. There are the obvious

difficulties arising from taken-for-granted assumptions, from gaps between social workers' self-perceptions in contrast to the experiences and observations of others, especially users, and from the desire to present a particular self- and professional image – we do not always see ourselves as others might see us. While these and similar challenges rightly lead to caution about self-responses, they do not negate the usefulness of securing a picture of how workers (in this case social workers) describe their own activities and the shaping of that activity. The social workers' self-descriptions are an important component of their practice, even if they are not an exhaustive picture of that practice. Recent years have seen rich goldmines of data from the lives and experiences of service users across most fields of social work practice; equally, there is a richness in knowing and understanding how practitioners in those fields describe and understand that practice, acknowledging that that understanding is but a part of the practice, albeit an important part.

The article is built, then, around three central arguments. First, to slightly paraphrase Mark Twain, the data from these practitioners suggest that reports of the death of social justice in social work are premature; social justice is in fact alive in the work of these practitioners. Second, this is reflected in their practice, but not in the form suggested in the critical commentaries on social work and social justice. Rather, it is reflected in their daily practice: the focus on broad social justice considerations has not attended adequately to practitioners' daily activities. Third, these daily activities are focused strongly on the lives of users (individuals and families) and are only partially developed and built on to contribute to a wider agenda of change. To that extent, the obituaries have some justification.

The article is organized as follows. It begins with a necessarily brief outline of the methodology involved in collecting the data, and then explores that data through an examination of practice at the micro, meso and macro levels summarized succinctly by Dominelli (2004). It concludes with a reflection on some of the implications for social work practice and the social work profession.

The research project

In March 2009, a random sample of 710 social workers was drawn from the membership list of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), the sole professional body for social workers in New Zealand. This sample represented approximately one in five of the then Association membership and was drawn from both the general membership and the *tangata whenua* membership list.[2] This approach was

Table 1. Comparison of participants and association membership

	ANZASW membership	Sample	Participants
Numbers	3849	710	191 (27%)
Social work qualification	Details not available	Not known	86.8%
Ethnicity	Māori 20.3%	Māori 27.5%	25.9%
	Non-Māori 79.7%	Non-Māori 72.5%	68.9%
Age distribution	< 30 7.79%	Not known	6.8%
	31–40 20.06%		21.6%
	41–50 30.07%		22.6%
	51–60 25.6%		32.1%
	> 60 6.95%		13.7%
Gender	Female 82%		Female 75.8%
	Male 18%		Male 21.1%

Note: Participant numbers will not always add to 100% because some participants did not answer the relevant question.

employed to try to obtain participants reflecting the breadth of Association membership and in order to secure a broad range of participants' experiences. One hundred and ninety one questionnaires were returned; 40 percent of the participants described themselves as working in front-line practice, with the remainder working in management, supervision, community work, social work education, private practice and supervision. Twenty six percent of the participants were Māori,[3] a slightly higher percentage than the Association membership, 76 percent were female (slightly lower than the Association membership) and 87 percent had a social work qualification. Table 1 compares the participants and the Association membership on a number of variables.

A set of structured questions was used to gather basic demographic data about the participants, while open-ended questions were used to explore the ways in which the practitioners defined social justice and linked their thinking about social justice to their social work practice. Once the draft questions were developed, the questionnaire was reviewed for clarity and coverage by a group of academic and practice colleagues. (The specific questions to which participants responded are set out in Appendix 1; questions one, three and five are drawn on in this article.) The approach adopted here is different from that discussed in Hawkins et al.'s work (2001), where the participants were presented with vignettes.

Explicitly asking about the connections between social justice and their practice may have led participants to frame their work to reflect these connections, but there is nothing in the data which would suggest that the connections were artificially created by the research process. Gray et al.'s (2002) work on the political participation of social workers suggests that such participation is quite strong in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The open ended questions were used to allow the practitioners an opportunity to articulate their own thinking without any prior construction as to the meaning of the term 'social justice' and/or its applications. No definition of 'social justice' was provided in order to solicit participants' own thinking and views about a term which, as indicated earlier, has wide definitions and descriptions in the academic and professional literature. While my own work within the social services and ANZASW may have influenced the practitioners' responses, there is no *prima facie* reason to suggest that this is so. It may be that non-participants decided not to return their questionnaire even after a follow-up letter because of my involvement with social justice and related issues; that is a question to which we do not know the answer and it is not possible, therefore, to make any claims as to the representativeness of the participants. However, the responses were certainly very rich in both the range of data that they traversed and in the extent of their responses, with many of the participants describing their practice experience and their analysis of that experience at considerable length. This article cannot do full justice to the richness of the data.

On receipt of the questionnaires, all responses were entered into a word document and these were then scrutinized through the use of key word searches to identify common terms, themes, approaches and issues. While data review and analysis began without any specific sets of words in mind, it quickly became apparent that many of the key words which appear in the literature such as equality, fairness, advocacy, rights and discrimination (and variants thereof) dominated the definitional responses. These terms were then used to provide a framework for exploring the responses. Seventy seven participants used the word 'equality' in their definition, while 23 used 'fairness' and a further 24 used both terms together.

In her use of micro, meso and macro dimensions of social work practice, Dominelli (2004) provides a useful framework for looking at the data here. This framework takes us across the total practice spectrum, from work with individuals and families through organizational and social change activities, and links these three dimensions together rather than treating them as comparatively separate and discrete entities.

The daily micro practice of social justice

Most of the practitioners who participated in the research were quite explicit in their use of key social justice terms to describe their work with users and their approach to that practice. The practitioners provided a wide range of examples of ways in which social justice was reflected and demonstrated in their practice. These examples were drawn from the diverse range of social work fields. In those examples, words like 'unfair/fair treatment', 'equality', 'advocacy', 'access', 'discrimination', 'rights' and 'opportunities' were widely used to describe the work they had undertaken, the approach to that work, and their role in relation to the users with whom they were working. It is worth noting here that these words and phrases reflected and echoed their definitional approach to social justice in which words such as 'equality', 'fairness' and 'rights' were widely used. A small sample of quotations from the participants illustrates the use of social justice language to describe incidents from their practice:[4]

> I witnessed many incidents where individuals were denied their *right* to financial support from WINZ [Work and Income New Zealand] when they presented on their own only to be granted it when they were *advocated* for.

> Promoting *rights* of tangata whenua to be involved in discussions regarding Māori clients. [child health centre]

> Supported a client who was paying fines to the Court that were unsustainable and *unfair*. I did a budget and wrote a letter and went with the client to the court and the fines were written off.

> *Advocacy*, broker, networking, case manager type roles with organizations to ensure that [the] client has a voice and can cope with injustices that mentally ill persons live with in society.

> Family from gang background were not treated as people. They were avoided and no one would help because of the risk. My role was to *advocate* on their behalf and plead (professionally) for help.

> My belief that this was oppressive, *discriminatory* and possibly antiracist behaviour provided confidence to challenge the behaviour of a consultant who was near the top of the DHB [District Health Board] hierarchy.

As has been indicated in these necessarily brief scenarios, the practitioners provided a range of examples of practice actions and experiences reflecting the needs, expectations and aspirations of individuals, families and carers. Such examples strongly dominated in the data that were obtained, reflecting both the nature of much of social work practice, the specific work of the agencies within which they are employed and, arguably, the focus of this research project. (As is noted in the discussion at the end of this article, the approach used in this project may have encouraged participants to focus on their individual practice.)

The focus on specific examples is to be expected, but it is the application of social justice terminology and frameworks which gives the data (and the discussion about social work practice) its particular flavour. The data is distinctive in that explicit and implicit links are made between the situations they are describing, the ways in which social justice informs their intervention in those situations, and the outcomes they are attempting to achieve. The practitioners were describing practice which attempted to 'bridge the duality of the personal and social' (Lundy, 2004: 57).

Nevertheless, as reflected in the literature, and noted earlier, social justice in social work has been very substantially, almost exclusively, examined and discussed in terms of the ways in which social work and social workers work towards social justice at the level of social change (or fail to do so), drawing on the daily experience of their work with users. The justifiable criticism that is often made (one which I have expressed) (O'Brien, 2005; Payne, 2006), is that social work has not pursued that element of its task consistently or effectively, and the discussion will return to that issue below. However, the evidence provided by these practitioners' descriptions suggests that focusing on the social change dimension of social justice work may have led commentators to paint an incomplete picture of the relationship between social justice and social work.

Reviewing the data from this research, social justice appears to be a significant component of social work practice, but it is a social justice which can be described as individualized and personalized, or what Lundy (2004: 57) describes as 'the duality of the personal and the social'. It is 'individualized and personalized' in that it is primarily focused on the individual and personal experiences of individuals and families. However, it is still very much social justice in that the practice is linked with ideas about social justice and is aimed at achieving social justice for the specific individuals and families concerned. In this sense, then, it goes significantly beyond the narrow practice of social work described by Sheppard (2006). Micro social work practice with individuals, their families and their carers is informed and shaped, in part at least, by efforts to secure socially-just outcomes for those users, outcomes

which will alter and improve users' lives and daily experiences and the quality of their lives and relationships. This is the nature of 'individualized and personalized' social justice. It is, then, practice which is consistent with the ethical requirements for social workers set out in the codes referred to at the start of this article. In many respects, the practice described here reflects key elements of Jordan's (2007) discussion about the ways in which the relationships between social workers and users contribute to justice and what Lovelock and Powell (2004: 183) refer to in their discussion of social work as 'the relationship between the individual and society'. That relationship is about 'individualized and personalized' justice or, put another way, social justice is met in the lives of our clients (Saleeby, 2009).

Towards just agencies and organizations

The emphasis thus far has been on the ways in which the practitioners draw on social justice ideas, concepts and terminology to inform their daily micro practice with users. Some of the practitioners went beyond their actions with, and on behalf of, individual users, and talked about their meso practice and their approach to social justice within their daily work by describing actions they had taken to change organizational policies, procedures and practices which had led to the injustice. They described situations in which they had worked actively with and for users to effect changes in services and/or in decisions made by their own or other agencies. Here, social justice involved changing decisions which did not provide users with the services they needed or, in some instances, were entitled to. Three brief examples will suffice:

> I regularly need to *advocate* for the *right* of the mentally ill and disabled to access the resources, sometimes extra resources to have their health, welfare, education needs met or a chance to do so, at the same or similar level to anyone else without mental health or disability issues.

> I have had to become a strong *advocate* for this client group to the point of arranging a meeting with our management and with low-cost housing providers about housing problems. [This refers to people being discharged from prison]

> Criteria were inconsistent and *discriminatory*. Policy changed to reflect *equality* for all in need. [This refers to criteria to decide eligibility for food parcels]

The participants also described taking action in relation to the practices and procedures of organizations other than their own, and to change the injustices within those organizations, as reflected in these examples:

> Established an *advocacy* service inclusive of regular meetings with WINZ to develop a good working relationship and ensure that all clients are treated fairly and equitably.

> A . . . property rental company used to tell my sole parent clients over the phone that a flat was available, then when they came to the agency to register, flats had mysteriously disappeared! A quick chat with the owner of the company reminded him that we have laws against this and that a good name for the practice was '*racism*'. Clients reported changes in the practice thereafter.

Another practitioner described writing to the Race Relations Office to complain about the behaviour of an organization, action which led to that office writing to the organization concerned to alert it to its obligations under the Human Rights Act (1993). As with the efforts to achieve socially just change within their own agency, these practitioners were looking to bring about changes which would have a wider application than being limited to the situation of the user with whom they were currently concerned. Again, actions to bring about these organizational changes do not of themselves change broader economic, cultural and social structures. Nor do they change broader policies of government or other institutions. However, as with the individually-focused user actions discussed earlier, they are actions which reflect the application and utilization of social justice in social work practice, informed by many of the values and aimed at the outcomes identified in the literature referred to at the beginning of this article.

Towards just policies

A small group of practitioners described moving beyond taking actions within their own agency and/or actions in relation to practices and procedures within other agencies described earlier. This group described how they had taken action at a wider political level, particularly – but not exclusively – in relation to government policies, in order to achieve social justice. Some of this action was about quite specific issues, with one participant describing, for example, writing to government ministers about eligibility criteria when a user was denied financial support to purchase hearing aids because of his age. Policy has since been changed. Others referred to macro actions which they had taken, using information and data from their practice, to argue and lobby for changes in government policies at a more general level; for example, the level of social security benefits or the cultural appropriateness of services.

> As a manager I have *advocated* for resources and policies to support kaupapa Māori agencies to deliver to whānau the way they know works best – rather than the way the pakeha contracting system works to fit the dominant culture (unjustly).[5]

There are a number of important issues which emerge from the contributions of this group of participants. Significantly, the number of examples of actions taken to effect changes at this broader political and structural level is quite small, indicating clearly that the practitioners' social justice work is focused on their work with individuals and families, and, to a more limited extent, to attempting to change organizational procedures, criteria and provision of services. Work on broader social issues and efforts to effect change at that broader level is, on the basis of the examples provided by these practitioners, quite limited. That is not a criticism of their work or their approach to their work; indeed I was deeply impressed by their work. However, it does raise other very significant and interesting questions which are taken up in the next section.

Some reflections and implications

One of the issues which this data does raise is whether the focus in the literature and debates about social work and social justice have been too limited by giving attention, rightly, to the broader social change questions around economic, social and cultural structures, and in doing so have not adequately attended to the struggles of practitioners trying to operationalize and work with these issues in their daily practice. Social justice as part of daily practice has received comparatively little attention. While focused on the individual and her/his family, this practice cannot be simply described as 'individualized justice' in that the data here suggest that the work and engagement with users is informed by, and located within, a social justice framework. In many respects, it encaptures and reflects those elements of social justice set out in Craig's definition at the start of this article, when he refers to the range of values which inform social justice and which 'translate these values into deeds' (Reisch and Andrews, quoted in Lundy, 2004: 197).

This is not an argument that the broader structural questions are not important: quite the contrary. Indeed, in the midst of the current economic, social and environmental crises, they are even more important than ever as patterns and structures of inequality widen and deepen internationally (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2008). Rather, drawing from and reflecting on Cribb and Gerwitz's (2003) work on

social justice in the school classroom, research on and thinking about daily social work practice needs to engage with that practice and with the daily experiences which practitioners, supervisors, managers and agencies face. Broader analysis and critical discussion of the relationship between social justice and social work needs to be complemented by careful and thoughtful exploration of the ways in which practitioners and their agencies reflect on and engage with the immediate situations which they face in order to extend and enhance the practice of social justice in both their daily work with users *and* then translate and utilize that knowledge for social change. This would strengthen the links between the daily work of practitioners and the advancement of social justice. It would also help to build towards a socially-just society, in the interests of social work users, thereby enacting and encapsulating the profession's values and implementing, in practical ways, the codes of ethics referred to at the beginning of this article.

Waldegrave (2009) describes social workers (and other similar groups) as 'thermometers of pain'. As here, he argues for the bearers of those thermometers to use the knowledge from their practice to alter the causes of that pain. Such action is clearly vital if social workers are to be true to their ethical codes, but their actions in working with that pain also need to be well informed by an active understanding and application of social justice ideas and principles. Like many social work authors, he argues that practitioners need to be aware of, and have their practice informed by, the contexts which shape the lives of those they work with. The argument here goes further than this. Daily practice needs to be informed by the ideas and principles of social justice; those principles and ideas cannot be reserved for analysis and subsequent action and, moreover, they are more than context. They must sit at the heart of practice and, in doing so, they will strengthen and affirm what we mean by social work.

The comparative paucity of examples in this research illustrating efforts to achieve wider systemic changes lends weight to the criticisms (noted earlier) that social work and social workers have failed to enact their social justice mandate. However, as the rest of the data indicate, this does not mean that social workers have abandoned social justice commitments. Rather, the evidence from this research suggests that social justice is still very much alive and well in the thinking of social workers about the nature of their practice, *but* it is a social justice which is focused strongly on their daily work rather than on impacting on and affecting economic, social and cultural structures which create and sustain injustice. The data certainly demonstrate an awareness of the significance of those structures, but limited action and engagement with challenging and changing them. Furthermore, it is clearly social justice rather than any form of individualized justice in

that there are clear links made between the practice and social justice definitions and descriptions. The work is located within a wider context, rather than being narrowly described.

There are multiple research questions and investigations which might build on and extend the work of this project. While this research project drew on practitioners' own descriptions of their experiences, using an open-ended approach to gathering the data, subsequent projects could usefully explore the experiences of users (e.g. do they experience practitioners working in socially just ways?). To what extent, if any, are the descriptions and experiences reported here paralleled in other countries? The construction of the questions here led, to some extent at least, to an emphasis on practice with individuals and families; what would we find through a set of questions which focused more explicitly on the 'macro' activities of social workers?

The data from this project raise one further very important and interesting implication: namely how to encourage, build and sustain the social justice commitment of individual practitioners and, equally, if not more importantly, how to develop action by the profession and others to bring about change in those economic, cultural and social structures in ways which enhance and advance social justice. That work and that responsibility cannot sit solely with individual social workers, conflicted as they often are by the demands of their employer and by the imperatives of responding to and engaging with immediately presenting and pressing user needs. Indeed, some of the participants provided very good examples of actions taken by organizations and managers when the social workers were involved in social change activities, including activities undertaken in their own time. In the context of a discussion of just practices in schools and education, Cribb and Gerwitz (2003: 28) observe: 'the teacher or educational administrator … has to find the best possible means of managing the tensions of the immediate situation with which they are faced. The words 'social worker or agency supervisor/manager' could easily be substituted, making the same argument germane to considerations of using and operationalizing social justice principles in the practice of social work, thereby ensuring that it is practice which is socially just. This will contribute to what Reisch (2002: 35) refers to as 'the synthesis between individual and collective wellbeing [which is] at the heart of debates about social justice', a synthesis which is reflected in the practice described here.

A significant component of engaging with the wider issues requires professional associations and other related bodies to take a leadership role and develop mechanisms and processes to link with and draw on the daily experiences of practitioners, an argument developed by Lundy (2004), Reisch (2002), Ife (2001) and Powell (2001) in other contexts. The social justice

demonstrated in the work of these practitioners indicates that the criticism that social workers are abandoning their commitment to social justice cannot be sustained if the focus moves to the ways in which social workers reflect on and describe their practice and the actions they take within that practice. Here, social justice is alive and active and informs their discussions of what they do with and for users in quite fundamental and significant ways. The critical task is to take that practice and translate it into social change work.

Notes

1. See, for example, the Codes of Ethics for the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, the Australian Association of Social Workers and the American Association of Social Workers, and the British Association of Social Workers. The Irish Association refers to 'justice in all its forms' rather than social justice (see also the American code: National Association of Social Workers).
2. Reflecting its bicultural framework, the association has two membership lists, one for general members and one for tangata whenua (indigenous) members. Numbers may not always add to 100 percent because of missing data.
3. Māori are the tangata whenua, the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand (see reference to tangata whenua later in text).
4. The words in italics, used by the research participants, are my emphasis throughout and are italicized in order to highlight the terminology.
5. 'Kaupapa' is loosely translated as purpose and 'whānau' as family, while 'pakeha' is generally used to refer to European (white) New Zealanders.

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Appendix 1

Research questions

1. How would you define or describe the term 'social justice'?
2. What has been the most important influence/s on your thinking about social justice?
3. Please describe a practice incident involving issues of social justice, identify what was unjust and how did your definition of social justice affect your practice?
4. What do you see to be the three most important social justice issues affecting social and community work practice?
5. Can you give an example of social work practice action you have taken to counteract injustice/promote justice?
6. How would you rank the following ideas about justice?: (1 = most important, 7 = least important)

    - Creating equal opportunity
    - Ensuring diverse treatment to meet individual circumstances
    - Ensuring fair distribution of resources
    - Ensuring the rules/law treats everybody the same
    - Equity for indigenous groups
    - Equity for all cultural groups
    - Providing extra resources to overcome economic disadvantage

Author biography

Mike O'Brien is Associate Professor and works in the social policy and social work programme at Massey University, Albany campus, where he was recently head of school and director of the social work and social policy programme. He has been at Massey

University since 1980 and in 2009 was Astrid Lindgren Guest Professor at Växjö University, Sweden. He is a life member of the association and a former president and is currently a member of the Association's Social Justice and Human Rights Governance Board. He is active in a range of social justice and social service groups and has written extensively on issues of child poverty, social security and social services.