

Enhancing the Readiness to Practise of Newly Qualified
Social Workers in Aotearoa New Zealand:
(enhance R2P)

TECHNICAL REPORT TWO
Analysis of Curriculum Documents

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1. Introduction.....	4
2. Taxonomy – A Type of Controlled Vocabulary	4
3. Developing Taxonomy Terms.....	5
TISWEANZ taxonomy	5
Topic inclusion criteria	5
Candidate terms.....	5
Te reo Māori and Pasifika language terms	6
Reference sources.....	6
Relationships between terms	6
Scope notes.....	6
4. Project Participants and the Core Dataset	7
Institutions and their social work programmes	7
Curriculum documentation.....	7
5. Processing the Documents	7
File formats and size	7
Unique identifiers	8
Coding in NVivo.....	8
6. Draft taxonomy.....	8
From coded documents to a taxonomy.....	8
Hierarchies	9
Work-in-progress	9
7. Conclusion	9
Appendix A: Facts and Figures from the Document Analysis.....	10
Appendix B: Common Topics in the Planned Curriculum.....	11
References.....	12

1. Introduction

This document reports on the analysis of curriculum documents, or course descriptors, used by the enhance R2P (eR2P) project to develop a taxonomy of social work education topics. The purpose of the taxonomy is to provide the research team with a common point of reference to support the indexing of the descriptors submitted by 14 of the 17 social work education providers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Phase one of the eR2P project intends to map the topics included in the social work curriculum of the participating providers' 19 social work programmes recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) at graduate and postgraduate level. The mapping will be used to explore the commonalities and differences in the Aotearoa New Zealand social work curriculum.

In order to do this the research team compiled the course descriptors used by participants to describe each course in their programmes. Analysis of these descriptors is in three stages:

1. Identify key educational topics from the course descriptors to create a social work education taxonomy called *Terms for Indexing Social Work Education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (TISWEANZ)
2. Use the taxonomy in a relational database to index the course descriptors and produce curriculum maps of each institution
3. Compare and contrast the resulting curriculum maps and report on the social work curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand

The remainder of this document explores the outcomes from the first stage of analysis to develop the taxonomy.

2. Taxonomy – A Type of Controlled Vocabulary

- A *controlled vocabulary* is a means of assigning consistent terms from selected content as a way of organising information for indexing and retrieval, to indicate relationships between terms and to eliminate ambiguity
- A *taxonomy* is a type of controlled vocabulary with a simple hierarchical structure that can lead users to specific terms that are grouped together within a particular domain
- A taxonomy is always evolving. For the purposes of this research, the *TISWEANZ taxonomy* is a tool to describe the topics found in the social work course descriptor dataset, at a point in time. It is a snapshot of the **actual** described curriculum rather than the **ideal**. For future research, or for other uses requiring a view of the social work curriculum, the taxonomy could be maintained, revised, restructured or developed — though this is outside the present scope

3. Developing Taxonomy Terms

TISWEANZ taxonomy

The taxonomy was developed using a bottom-up approach, where the terms were derived from the content of the curriculum documents, and the hierarchical structures and relations were created as more terms were added. It is an iterative process. A library information science professional identified the initial *candidate terms*. Consultation followed with other eR2P team members, all experienced social work educators from different NZ institutions, to refine these into *preferred terms* for inclusion in the taxonomy. A draft version of the taxonomy was made available to the participating institutions for comment and feedback before the taxonomy was agreed.

Topic inclusion criteria

Based on the literature, the following criteria were developed for selecting taxonomy topics:

1. The topic is part of the social work education curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand
2. The topic is significant enough that a social work educator, student or programme quality assessor might want to search the curriculum to discover where that topic is taught
3. The inclusion of the topic is likely to meaningfully increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the taxonomy as an index of core educational content
4. Social work educators want and expect the topic to be included
5. The topic is of medium-level granularity¹, being neither too broad nor too narrow in scope

Candidate terms

Candidate or provisional terms selected from the course descriptors follow the natural language found in the documents. It was observed that the detail in the curriculum documents varied not only between institutions but from course to course within an institution. Terms themselves are not right or wrong. They represent a writer's description of the planned curriculum. Candidate terms were not created or imposed if the topic or concept was not present in the documents. For this research, the TISWEANZ taxonomy reflects the described social work curriculum at a point in time.

¹ Granularity is a term used to refer to how fine grained or detailed a concept is in relation to other higher level concepts: so *social work* is a high level concept; *child protection* is a middle level concept; and *Signs of Safety* is lower level and more fine grained

Te reo Māori and Pasifika language terms

Most terms are in English but some are in te reo Māori or Samoan (approximately 15% of terms) though the taxonomy is not multilingual. As for all the candidate terms, the use of Māori and Pasifika terms is dependent on the understanding and usage of the writer. *Scope notes* have been added to help taxonomy users. Where Māori and the equivalent English terms are widely used, both terms are included and indicated by a *related term* note, e.g. *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and *Treaty of Waitangi*.

Reference sources

Three existing controlled vocabularies were used as sources of disambiguation: the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*; National Library's *Ngā Upoko Tukutuku / Māori Subject Headings*; and the *Social Care Online thesaurus* (UK). The international standards document ANSI/NISO Z39.19-2005 (2010) *Guidelines for the Construction, Format and Management of Monolingual Controlled Vocabularies* was referred to for guidance in formatting the terms.

Relationships between terms

In the taxonomy, three types of relationships between terms help users to navigate the content information. These are:

- *Equivalence relationships* between preferred and non-preferred terms. Appended to the term, this is denoted by **USE** (for a preferred term) and **UF** (or Use For, for a non-preferred term) to control synonyms, abbreviations, variations in spelling, etc.
- *Hierarchical relationships* between broader and narrower terms, indicating subordination among concepts. This is denoted as **BT** (broader term) and **NT** (narrower term), and allows for navigation both ways between more and less specific terms
- *Associative relationships* between related terms denoted as **RT**. In TISWEANZ, related terms are similar concepts or are Māori and English language equivalents where both terms are used widely in the content, e.g. *Māori customs* and *tikanga*. This allows for the natural use of te reo Māori in English-language documents to describe particular concepts

Scope notes

Scope notes (denoted as **SN**) are appended to terms to provide advice on a term's usage or to distinguish between terms that may have an overlapping meaning. In TISWEANZ, scope notes include definitions for Māori and Pasifika language terms taken from *Ngā Upoko Tukutuku / Māori Subject Headings*, the online *Māori Dictionary* and other reputable sources.

4. Project Participants and the Core Dataset

Institutions and their social work programmes

Of the 17 New Zealand institutions, who between them offer 22 SWRB-recognised programmes, 14 institutions participated in the eR2P study with a total of 19 graduate and postgraduate programmes. In some institutions the same course may be taught as part of two different programmes, e.g. for 4th year Bachelor's and Honours degrees, or for Honours and Master's degrees.

Curriculum documentation

The institutions were invited to send relevant curriculum documents used in their most recent SWRB recognition event or, in the case of institutions going through recognition renewal, documents supporting the new 4-year degree programmes. Curriculum documents were sought for all courses that make up a programme and provide information on a course's content, learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment tasks. Most of the documents received were course descriptors or outlines. All were in English.

In the end, 401 compulsory and elective course descriptors were identified with only one unobtainable for analysis in some form². The majority were submitted as electronic files by the participating institutions. There were some issues in obtaining contributory courses taught by departments outside of the main social work school, e.g. psychology, sociology or Māori language. If specific course descriptors could not be obtained directly, the decision was made to use the content, outcome and assessment information on the institution's website, if informative enough. During the research analysis, the files were stored in the enhance R2P Basecamp web-based project management software and the NVivo 11 qualitative research management software.

5. Processing the Documents

File formats and size

There was a mix of PDF and MS Word files, with some entire programmes submitted as a single document rather than as separate components. Some documents were in tabular form. Individual course descriptors ranged in size from one to 55 pages, though most were one to three pages in length.

² One compulsory level 5 paper was unobtainable as the department responsible for it had concerns that it could be used to create a similar course elsewhere, despite the project's Ethics Statement that: individual institutions will not be identified in any public output; no attempt will be made to evaluate programmes; and curriculum documents submitted will be accessible only by the research team for the purpose of this research

Unique identifiers

The descriptors were separated into individual documents and given a unique, 8-character project identifier consisting of an institution code, document sequence number, NZ Qualifications Framework (NZQF) level number and a compulsory/elective indicator.

Coding in NVivo

The individual files were ingested into NVivo using their unique identifiers. Each document in NVivo was coded for three main types of information:

1. **Metadata** about the course descriptor, based on the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set: compulsory/elective status, credit or point value, teaching delivery method, unique identifier, format, language, NZQF level, main subject, institution code and title. This information is not included in the published TISWEANZ taxonomy but some will be used by the researchers to analyse the data in the taxonomy database. The metadata also provides a useful view on the nature of the courses in the dataset (see *Appendix A and B*)
2. **Key content topics** within each descriptor, and any synonyms or equivalent terms used, that describe the course and can be used as candidate terms for the taxonomy. As more data is coded, the terms are refined in an iterative process to create the taxonomy
3. **Teaching and assessment concepts** for each course. Due to the extent of the data coded for each descriptor, these concepts were coded but are considered outside the scope of this research phase

6. Draft taxonomy

From coded documents to a taxonomy

The NVivo node list of preferred terms was exported as an MS Excel spreadsheet to create the draft taxonomy, including the hierarchies, term relationships and scope notes. The spreadsheet was then copied into MS Word for ease of access.

The node list spreadsheet exported from NVivo will also be used as the initial input to load the terms and their associated information into the taxonomy relational database for further analysis.

Hierarchies

Some terms were grouped together as the list of candidate terms grew to create the broader term – narrower term relationships that are displayed as hierarchies, e.g.

social work skills
NT *assessment*
NT *psychosocial assessment*
NT *communication skills*
NT *engagement*

This taxonomy includes all three types of hierarchical relationships where the narrower term is:

- more specific than the broader term or
- an instance of the broader term or
- a constituent part of the broader term

At the time of writing, the nesting of narrower terms can go to four levels. Broader terms were not created specifically to group together perceived ‘narrower’ terms, if the broader term was not present in the course descriptors. Instead, the ‘narrower’ terms stand alone in the taxonomy. The creation of hierarchies can be subjective and represent one way to group related topics.

Work-in-progress

No taxonomy is ever finished. The draft taxonomy represents a snapshot of the social work curriculum according to the course documents at the time of submission. It is open to comment and change from subject matter experts, if cogent arguments can be made. Approximately 600 terms are included in the draft taxonomy.

7. Conclusion

This document has reported on the analysis of the curriculum documents in the eR2P project in order to develop the TISWEANZ taxonomy. It describes the methods and terminology, the project participants and core dataset, and some of the issues encountered. For this phase of the project, the taxonomy of the planned social work curriculum is dependent on the quality and level of detail in the documents analysed. Although the taxonomy is subjective and malleable, it gives a high-level view of how the curriculum is presented in course documentation across 82% of institutions and 86% of programmes, and it allows for further research in analysing the relationship between the planned and taught social work curricula in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Appendix A: Facts and Figures from the Document Analysis

Metadata About the Core Dataset	Total
Tertiary institutions offering SWRB-recognised social work programmes	17
SWRB-recognised social work programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate)	22
Course descriptors	401
<i>Participating tertiary institutions</i>	14
Polytechnics / private training institutes / wānanga	9
Universities	5
<i>Participating SWRB-recognised social work programmes</i>	19
Undergraduate degrees	14
Bachelor's Honours degrees	2
Master's degrees	3
<i>Course descriptors obtained for analysis</i>	400
Course descriptors NOT obtained	1
PDF format files	189
Text format files	211
Compulsory courses	351
Elective courses ³	49
NZQF level 5 courses (1 st year)	115
NZQF level 6 courses (2 nd year)	101
NZQF level 7 courses (3 rd & 4 th year) ⁴	148
NZQF level 8 courses (Honours) ⁵	12
NZQF level 9 courses (Master's)	32
Courses with a value between 15 to 20 credits / points	327
Courses with a value between 30 to 45 credits / points	68
Courses with a value between 60 to 90 credits / points	4
Courses with a value not described	1
Field placement courses	28

³ 'Elective' includes courses within the same programme that are core for one stream of study but elective for another

⁴ Three level 7 (4th year) courses are also taught as level 8 (Honours) courses

⁵ Five level 8 (Honours) courses are also taught as level 9 (Masters) courses

Appendix B: Common Topics in the Planned Curriculum

This list is a rough guide to the key topics identified in the titles of the course descriptors. Some course descriptors were coded to more than one topic, e.g. child and family law, or child mental health. The common topics occurred ten times or more during analysis and represent 67% of the key topics identified in the document titles.

Common Topics from the Course Descriptor Titles

1. Social work methods
2. Research
3. Social work skills
4. Social work knowledge
5. Social policy
6. Children / youth
7. Communities
8. Te Tiriti o Waitangi
9. Families
10. Human development
11. Te reo Māori
12. Diversity

References

- ANSI/NISO Z39.19-2005 (2010). *Guidelines for the construction, format and management of monolingual controlled vocabularies*. Retrieved from http://www.niso.org/apps/group_public/download.php/12591/z39-19-2005r2010.pdf
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