

---

# Then and now

Margaret McKenzie

---

*Margaret McKenzie, is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Community Development, Otago University, where she is currently the Head of School. She has been a co-editor of Social Work Review. Mary Nash is a Senior Lecturer in social work, School of Health and Social Services, Massey University. She is a Life Member of ANZASW, and erstwhile editor of Social Work Review, and is currently co-editor of Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review*

---

**McCreary, John (1982). Guest editorial. *New Zealand Social Work*, 7(3), 3-4.**

**Pilalis, Jennie (1982). Social work education in New Zealand. *New Zealand Social Work*, 7(3), 25-29**

My task was to choose an article from the 1974-1983 decade.

Interestingly this period coincides with my entry into social work, so it was with great interest that I dipped into these issues. What memories they sparked ... influential times; issues, topics and people reappeared. These are, of course, personal; different people surveying the period would have found others.

Given many possible avenues for exploration, a representative piece for the decade was impossible. Eventually I settled upon two linked pieces, a Guest Editorial from a leading figure in NZ social work education, Professor John McCreary, and an article from Jennie Pilalis, then on the Massey staff, a contributor who featured several times in my refining of potential selections. These appeared in a September 1982 issue focused on education; perhaps the selection is not surprising given my current field, but as key aspects of social work education in New Zealand are (again) being debated between stakeholders these papers make a contribution for readers today.

McCreary, himself looking backwards, begins by identifying seven points of progress. This makes for interesting reading; how many of these can we still claim? The first acclaiming the successful establishment of professional courses in universities and a teachers college, notes the ongoing tension for social work education of the demands of the academy and requirements of an applied discipline. Second, he reports the immeasurable improvement of the process of student placement and supervision, particularly because of the ability and willingness of the field to assume responsibility for social work training. Third, the advent of the SWTC securing the spread of social work education. His fourth point is the value of an accreditation system that is undertaken by representatives across the field, administrators, practitioners and educators but at the same time a concern that the setting of minimum standards may be restrictive and restrain creativity. Fifth is the valuing of the presence of community work and workers in mainstream social work education and sixth the establishment of four-year programmes allowing young people a route into the profession with pre-entry training. Seventh is that introducing financial arrangements to assist students meant the financial hardship of field placement provision had been removed.

After this list of achievements he turns to challenges still outstanding. Again the question for us becomes: how many of these have we met?

---

McCreary's major concern is the lack of a truly New Zealand approach, that US and UK material dominate our curriculum and thus may dominate our minimum standards. Linked to this he questions the ability of tools and strategies of teaching derived from this material to address specific indigenous and settler society tensions in New Zealand. His third concern is with the uneasy transition students experience between course and agency and his fourth the dearth of post-qualification study.

It seems to me that we have made great strides in answering this latter set of challenges. While each of them remains a focus for our programmes there are areas of real progress and achievement, particularly the development of an Aotearoa New Zealand social work body of knowledge, and associated skills and methods which are recognised and extolled nationally and internationally. The growth of postgraduate qualifications is also considerable.

The position is not so encouraging on McCreary's list of achievements however; many of these are no longer secure, are under threat and are linked to McCreary's recognition of both the ongoing uneasy transition between education and workplace and the tension between the demands of the academy and requirements of an applied discipline. Indeed these two concerns are at the centre of current debate on workforce requirements and funding problems. We are again debating the location of programmes, whether we are educating in or training for social work, course length and curricula. Who should provide quality assurance? What mix of educationalists, professional associations and employers should be involved? How should field placements be funded?

Jennie Pilalis's paper presents five models of education and discusses their potential implications for directing social work education including a potted history of their influences on NZ social work education in order to ask where to next. She lists six mechanisms for changing educational programmes (Walker, 1973, in Pilalis 1982, p.28), five of which are vested interest or stakeholder drivers, while the sixth, Rational Debate, is promoted as the way forward in 1982. Twenty-six years later her question, how will the next period of social work education proceed, will 'Rational Debate or Vested Interests?' dominate, seems just as relevant.

Re-reading these two contributions reminds us that the social work education since 1982 has seen great gains, but significant threats if not losses still exist on concerns two and half decades on. As Pilalis asked then, we need to ask now, which model, which mix, can best take us forward in 2009?

---

## Guest editorial

*John McCreary*

---

Being asked to write a guest editorial nearly 34 years after the first professor was appointed to the Chair in the School of Social Science inevitably turns my thoughts to examining these years. My own approaching retirement date, January 31st, 1983, puts even greater pressure on me to make this a potpourri of reminiscences. Although I will try to avoid this temptation it is, perhaps worth pausing to ask where social work education is at present.