A SEARCH FOR VIRTUE ETHICS

SOCIAL WORK ETHICS CURRICULUM AND EDUCATORS' SURVEY

Authors:

Manohar Pawar
Richard Hugman
Andrew Alexandra
A. W. (Bill) Anscombe
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Manohar Pawar is Professor of Social Work at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University and is the President of the International Consortium for Social Development. He has over 30 years of experience in social work education, research and practice in Australia and India. He is the lead chief investigator of research funded by the Australian Research Council’s Discovery project that focuses on virtues and social work practice. The Council on Social Work Education Commission on Global Social Work Education, USA, selected Professor Pawar to deliver the prestigious 2017 Hokenstad International lecture. Recently, Australian and New Zealand Social Work and Welfare Education Research conferred a Social Work Educator Award 2018 and the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India conferred a Lifetime Achievement Award 2017 on him. In addition, Manohar has received a Citation Award for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning (2008, from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council) and Quality of Life Award (2001, from the Association of Commonwealth Universities). His interests and recent publications include Social Work: Innovations and Insights (co-edited, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018); Empowering Social Workers: Virtuous Practitioner (co-edited, Springer, 2017); Future Directions in Social Development (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Reflective Social Work Practice: Thinking, Doing and Being (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Water and Social Policy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Social and Community Development Practice (Sage, 2014); International Social Work: Issues, Strategies and Programs (2nd ed., Sage 2013); and Sage Handbook of International Social Work (edited, Sage, 2012).

Richard Hugman is currently Professor of Social Work at the University of New South Wales and has practised, taught and researched in Australia and the United Kingdom. From 2002 to 2008 he was a member of the International Federation of Social Workers ethics committee and subsequently chaired the committee from 2008 to 2014. Richard has published widely on ethics, including Rethinking Values and Ethics in Social Work (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Culture, Values and Ethics in Social Work: Embracing Diversity (Routledge, 2013) and New Approaches for Ethics for the Caring Professions (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Andrew Alexandra is Senior Research Fellow in the Australian Research Council Special Research Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne, with research and teaching interests in political philosophy and professional and applied ethics. Among his many publications in these areas are his co-authored books, Reason, Values and Institutions (Tertiary Press, 2002); Police Ethics (2nd ed., Allen & Unwin, 2006); Ethics in Practice: Moral Theory and the Professions (UNSW Press, 2009); Integrity Systems for Occupations (Ashgate, 2010) and Media, Markets, and Morals (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); and his co-edited book, Private Military and Security Companies: Ethics, Policies and Civil-Military Relations (Routledge, 2008). Andrew has engaged in consultancies and collaborative research projects with a range of professional groups, including the Australian Association of Social Workers, Victoria Police, the Safety Institute of Australia, the Consumers Health Forum, the Professional Standards Council (New South Wales) and the Australian Anthropological Society.

A.W. (Bill) Anscombe is Adjunct Associate Professor of Social Work at Charles Sturt University (CSU). Prior to retiring, he had 21 years at CSU and before that 20 years in Corrections, where he held trainee to senior management positions. He was seconded from the university to be the Director for Child Protection (Western) as part of the then New South Wales Department of Community Services, with responsibility for 70 per cent of the state geographically. He also operated in a joint appointment between CSU and the Department of Community Services for four years. He is currently a voluntary director of four not-for-profit small/medium human service companies or associations. He has an active, committed Christian faith. Bill’s research interests and projects have been broad, including in the areas of Indigenous housing and governance, multicultural Australia, rural social services and numerous service evaluations. His doctoral studies were on “Consilience in social work: Reflections on thinking, doing and being”. His most recent publication is Reflective Social Work Practice: Thinking, Doing and Being (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
GLOSSARY

**Consequentialism** – the value of an act is judged in terms of its outcomes (or consequences); there are types of consequentialism, including acts that follow a rule that ought to produce a good outcome, acts that are intended to produce a good outcome and consideration of whether acts actually do produce a good outcome; consequentialism is a form of teleological ethics

**Deontology** – ethics based on duty to a principle that can be applied to every person

**Ethical dilemma** – a situation in which a person must make a decision or act (including choosing not to act) in which there is a conflict between equally plausible but distinct values

**Ethics** – the branch of philosophy that considers moral values

**Professional ethics** – statements of ethical values applied to the work of a given profession, usually expressed in terms of principles, rules and guidelines

**Reflective practice** – active consideration by a practitioner of all the factors involved in decision making and actions, including knowledge, values, prior assumptions, emotions, perceptions and outcomes, with the purpose of reviewing current practice and improving future practice

**Teleology** – actions are evaluated in terms of desired ends

**Utilitarianism** – values are determined by the sum of the consequences of an act, namely its utility in producing a balance of good over bad outcomes for the greatest number of people; utilitarianism is a particular form of consequential ethics

**Virtue** – excellence in the traits or characteristics of a particular person or object; ethical values relate to excellence in moral qualities (such as honesty in a person), while functional virtues concern the fulfilment of a purpose (such as a clock that shows the time accurately)

**Virtue ethics** – considerations of those moral values or qualities that relate to traits or characteristics of a person
INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study is to find out whether, and to what extent, virtue ethics or the development of qualities and character of social workers is covered in the social work ethics curriculum, and what social work ethics educators think about the role of virtues in social work ethics learning and teaching. In simple words, virtues are qualities, character, good habits or attributes of practitioners that help them to achieve excellence in their practice. In social work practice, the concept of virtues is constructed by linking values/principles and qualities and attributes and roles and functions (Pawar, Hugman, Alexandra, & Anscombe, 2017, pp. 2–5). Pawar et al. (2017) state,

virtues are an integration of values or principles, qualities or attributes, roles and functions of a social worker in a broad sense. In other words, virtues are a relative mix of values, roles and functions buttressed by certain qualities and attributes that are consistently—in tangible and intangible ways—expressed and observed through actions and inactions in terms of emotions, words, deeds, outputs and outcomes (p. 5).

Drawing on the qualitative analysis of the social work ethics curriculum and the social work ethics educators’ survey, this paper presents the nature and scope of social work ethics subjects in terms of learning outcomes, overall curriculum content, textbooks used, teaching approaches, challenges and strategies for teaching and assessment methods and practices. It also discusses social work ethics educators’ views about teaching virtue ethics. Overall, it argues that there is not conclusive evidence to suggest whether or not virtue ethics is covered in social work ethics subjects, given the above conceptualisation of virtue. Virtue ethics is captured in terms of values and principles. While these subjects do cover values and principles, there appears to be little conscious attention to the development of the qualities of character that are central to virtuous practice (though these may develop naturally to some extent). Further in-depth research is needed to explore the place of virtue ethics in social work ethics subjects (see Pawar, et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

It appears that virtue ethics in social work ethics subjects is at a nascent stage. McBeath and Webb (2002) argued that virtue ethics is largely ignored in social work. Some aspects of current social work education, training and practice, particularly through its code of ethics, appear to suggest that they are heavily tilted towards rules, norms, regulations, procedures, routines, outputs (rather than outcomes) and performance indicators under the dominance of deontological (Kant, 1964; Hugman, 2005; Banks, 2008, 2012; Webb, 2010) and consequential/utilitarian (Furrow, 2005, p. 45; Hugman, 2005; Bowles, Collingridge, Curry, & Valentine, 2006, p. 61; Banks, 2012; Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2016)) traditions, to the extent that often “human being/self” is taken out of practice. Hugman and Banks discuss this issue at some length in their respective books. Focusing on virtue, quality and character aspects of social workers’ being/self, can help to correct that tilt (Aristotle, 1976; Hugman & Smith, 1995; Clark, 2000, 2006; McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1020; Hugman, 2005; Banks, 2012; Bowles et al., 2006; Miller, 2014).

In our earlier research we have argued that it is vital to strengthen certain qualities and virtues as an integral part of social workers’ being/self to serve people better (Pawar et al., 2017; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015). Although some textbooks (for example, Bowles et. al., 2006; Banks & Gallagher, 2009; McAuliffe, 2014; Gray & Webb, 2010) make a slight reference to virtue ethics, it is not clear to what extent virtue ethics is part of the social work ethics curriculum and what social work ethics educators think about it. In view of this clear gap in the literature and to verify McBeath and Webb’s (2002) assertion that virtue ethics is largely ignored, the following objectives were set.

OBJECTIVES

• To explore the curriculum content of social work ethics subjects to find out whether virtue ethics is included in the curriculum.

• To ascertain social work ethics educators’ views about learning and teaching of virtue ethics to social work students.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What is the curriculum content of social work ethics subjects?
• What are the resources and learning/teaching methods used to teach social work ethics subjects?
• Is virtue ethics covered in the social work ethics curriculum and taught to social work students?

RESEARCH METHOD

By employing a mostly qualitative research method (Pawar, 2004; Liamputtong, 2013), data were collected from two sources for this study. Firstly, an open-ended questionnaire was mailed to all social work ethics educators at 30 Australian schools of social work. The questionnaire covered broad areas of teaching resources and methods, ethics curriculum content, coverage of virtue ethics, assessment practices and the professional background of respondents. Over a period of about eight months, with minimal reminders only eight completed questionnaires were received, which is about 27 per cent response rate. Further follow-up with several reminders, phone calls and emails altogether resulted in 22 completed questionnaires, which covered about 73 per cent of social work schools from all states and territories—one each from the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia; two from South Australia; five from New South Wales; six from Queensland and five from Victoria. In addition to completing the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide their social work ethics curriculum, which was the second source of data. From one university, the social work ethics curriculum was directly downloaded from the website, though a completed questionnaire was not received from it. Of the 22 questionnaire respondents, three universities did not have a separate ethics curriculum—it was spread across several subjects. Altogether 23 social work ethics curricula (15 BSW and 8 MSW) were collected. The total numbers of completed questionnaires and social work ethics curricula do not match because, as stated earlier, three of the universities did not have a social work ethics specific curriculum, some submitted both BSW and MSW curricula and some submitted only one, depending upon their course offering.

Both data sets—questionnaire and social work ethics curriculum—were manually analysed (Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 1977; Mayring, 2000). Relevant variables under the professional background of respondents were analysed by calculating additions and percentages. Responses to most of the open-ended questions were analysed by identifying or developing appropriate themes and categories. Each social work ethics curriculum was carefully read to explore whether virtue ethics, the development of character or qualities was covered in the curriculum. Objectives and outcomes, curriculum content, assessments and suggested and prescribed reading material were looked at. In addition, specific terms such as virtue(s), values, character, qualities, principles, social justice, human rights, professional identity, professional integrity, relational ethics and Aristotle were searched for, as our concept of virtue can be linked to these terms.

The following results need to be read with an awareness of some of the limitations of this research approach. The research methods we employed and the data we collected and analysed are far from perfect. The quality of responses to the questionnaire was greatly varied and most of the questionnaires were not filled in as a straight response to the research invitation. As a lot of persuasion and reminders helped to obtain completed questionnaires, we are not sure whether that has impacted the nature of response. Although we carefully read the social work ethics curriculum/subject outlines, we realise that it is difficult to be sure whether or not virtue ethics are covered in these subjects. Most of the curricula covered the AASW code of ethics, for example, which contains implicit and explicit elements of virtue ethics, while virtue ethics may be covered in the classroom even if none of the specific search terms are found in the curriculum/subject outline. So, the examination of social work ethics curriculum/subject outlines may not be a totally reliable measure, though a broad evidence-based impression may be gathered from it. To overcome the weakness in this research approach, in the questionnaire we have directly asked ethics educators whether and how they cover virtue ethics in their social work ethics learning and teaching. We believe that the analysis of these data sets together should help us draw some suggestive conclusions about our objectives and research questions.

This research was conducted according to the research ethics guidelines, and Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee approved the research proposal (protocol no: 2014/057).
BACKGROUND OF PARTICIPANTS

As presented in Table 1, about half of the participants (n=10) were in the age group of 55 to 59 years, one-fifth of them 44 to 48 years, the same proportion 51 to 54 years and the remaining two were 60 and 62 years old. Two did not respond to the question. The age group of participants suggests that most of them were very experienced educators. Twelve (57%) were female and nine (43%) were male participants, and one did not respond to the question. Over half (n=13) of the participants’ universities were located in urban areas, about one-fifth in regional areas and the same proportion in rural areas, and one did not respond to this question.

Table 1: Demographic background of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44-48</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>BSW Hon. and PhD</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-54</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>BSW, Masters, PhD</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>BSW and Masters</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BSc, Masters, PhD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants except one had a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) professional qualification, about one-fourth (n=6) had only BSW and Masters and nearly three-fourths (n=16) had a PhD qualification (five of them BSW honours and PhD and the remaining Bachelors, Masters and PhD). Some participants also had other qualifications, such as certificates and diplomas. In addition to social work disciplinary background, a small number of them related their background to sociology, community education, legal education, nursing, law, management, education, humanities, political science and science. Nearly two-thirds (n=14) of them were members of the AASW and the remaining (n=8) were not. About one-third of them had taught the social work ethics subject for less than five years, about two-fifths had taught six to ten years and over one-fourth of them had for more than 11 years (see Table 2).

Table 2: Experience of teaching social work ethics to social work students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of years</th>
<th>&lt; 1</th>
<th>1–5</th>
<th>6–10</th>
<th>11–15</th>
<th>16–20</th>
<th>21–30</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS

SOCIAL WORK ETHICS SUBJECT TITLES AND THEIR FOCUS

Table 3 shows titles of 22 social work ethics subjects. Each title is different from the other and to some extent these titles may indicate the subject’s broad perspective in terms of whether it is solely ethics focused or it covered other aspects of the social work course. Further analysis of these subject outlines showed that in 11 subjects social work ethics was the stand-alone focus and 12 subjects covered some other relevant social work curricula (for example, law, organisational context, human rights), which has implications for breadth and depth of ethics coverage.

According to the survey of ethics educators, eight stated that they had social work ethics stand-alone focus; the same number stated that their ethics content is distributed across a range of 14 subjects, such as research, community work, group work, work with individuals, field education and social policy. The remaining ethics educators stated that although they had ethics stand-alone focus, ethics is also embedded in other subjects within the course.

Table 3: Social work ethics subject titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BSW social work ethics</th>
<th>MSW social work ethics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and theories for social work</td>
<td>Social work theory and ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical dilemmas and social justice</td>
<td>Integrity in social work practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical professional practice</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary professional ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and social work practice</td>
<td>Human rights, law and ethics contexts for social work practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights and social justice: Values, ethics and the legal context of social work</td>
<td>The ethical, legal and organisational contexts of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy, knowledge and ethics</td>
<td>Ethical, legal and organisational contexts of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and professional practice</td>
<td>The legal and ethical contexts of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional values and ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights, law and ethics in social work practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal and ethical dimensions of social work and human services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical, legal and organisational contexts of practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics and professional practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics in the social sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study also explored the difference between BSW and MSW social work ethics curricula. The curriculum analysis of BSW and MSW subject outlines revealed minor variance in assessment tasks and outcomes, and most of the content by and large remained the same. In the survey, six of the educators stated that the BSW and MSW curricula are the same, whereas three of them said that their curricula are different and nine of them did not respond to the question.

OUTCOMES

In the subject outlines the number of outcomes listed ranged from three to ten, though nearly half of the subject outlines listed five outcomes. In 23 social work ethics subject outlines, altogether 128 outcomes were analysed. The analysis suggested that these outcomes may be categorised under 12 broad areas as presented in Table 4. Although they are listed here according to the highest to lowest frequencies, they did not appear in any particular order in the subject outlines.
Table 4: Analysis of outcomes stated in the social work ethics subject outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Acquiring knowledge of theories (social work, ethics, legal) for practice</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Understanding of dilemmas/issues</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Understanding philosophy relating to ethics</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Organisational and legal context for practice</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ethical decision-making framework/models</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reflecting on/thinking about self-values and professional values</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Justifying/defending/reasoning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Identifying values and principles in the code of ethics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Identifying, critiquing and assessing values and principles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ethical aspects relating to cultural competency</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Application of the code of ethics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other outcomes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the outcomes was that on completion of the subject students were expected to critically acquire knowledge of theories relating to social work, ethics, philosophy, sociology and psychology, human rights and social justice, Australian legal system and relevant laws and apply them in practice. Most of the social work ethics subjects aimed to achieve the outcome of identifying, understanding and analysing ethical dilemmas/issues/challenges in a range of practice contexts, including legal and organisational. In some subject outlines a broad understanding of philosophy, different philosophical views relating to ethics, including moral philosophy and social work philosophy, moral context of social work and social justice were stated under outcomes. Many outcomes focused on helping students to develop critical awareness of the overall context (one even referred to historical context) in which they work, particularly with reference to ethical, legal, organisational contexts and regulatory frameworks, and their implications for practice. It was stated in many subjects that at the end of the study students would be expected to be able to critically understand ethical decision-making models/frameworks and apply them in resolving ethical dilemmas in a responsible, accountable and transparent manner. Some stated outcomes suggested the significance of examining or reflecting on one’s own values and professional values, and personal and professional self. Some subject outcomes aimed to develop the ability to reason, defend and justify certain solutions/decisions/options in light of ethical considerations. A critical understanding, in terms of identifying, critiquing and assessing, values and principles and their links to ethics was stated in six outcomes. In some outcomes it was explicitly stated that students would be able to identify values and principles inherent in the code of ethics and apply the professional code of ethics in practice. A small number of outcomes focused on ethical aspects relating to working with Aboriginal population groups, multicultural populations in diverse contexts, cultural appropriateness and knowledges. Other outcomes related to exploring the nature of power and its implications, evolution of human rights regime, factors behind access to justice, generic practice skills, social action and the integration of social work theories and the development of professional identity.

**CURRICULUM CONTENT**

The analysis of 23 social work ethics subject outlines/curricula revealed extreme diversity in the topics included in the subject. Altogether 146 different topics were found (Appendix 1). Table 5 shows those topics that had more than three frequencies. The most common curriculum topic was ethical decision-making models or frameworks, followed by the AASW code of ethics, ethical dilemmas, ethical theories human rights, legal context of social work and social justice. Only four subject outlines explicitly included the topic of virtue ethics. As stated earlier, 12
subjects covered other relevant social work curricula along with social work ethics and, depending upon the focus of
the subject, the topics included varied. For example, some covered a lot of social work theory, a few focused on
human rights and social justice, and about one-fourth focused on legal and procedural aspects.

Table 5: Curriculum content topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum content topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ethical decision-making models</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AASW code of ethics</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ethical dilemmas</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ethical theories/frameworks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Organisational context</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Legal context</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Introduction to ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Privacy and confidentiality</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reflective practice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>AASW practice standards</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Moral philosophy and ethical theory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Virtue/virtue-based theories/virtue ethics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Deontological theories/duty-based theories</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Self-care/caring for ourselves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>What are ethics and why do we use them in social work?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Consequentialism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Critical theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Feminist theories</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Post-modern theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: 1. Topics that had less than three frequencies are not included.*

2. Twenty-seven topics had two frequencies and 97 topics had single frequency (see Appendix 1).

The study also explored the main concepts/theories used to teach social work ethics subjects to social work
students. The analysis showed that social work ethics educators used about 30 concepts/theories in varied
combinations (see Table 6 and Appendix 2). About half of the educators used the concepts/theories relating to
virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology. Some also drew on human rights and anti-oppressive practice and the
application of the AASW code of ethics in practice, and ethical decision-making models. The other
concepts/theories that are stated with less than two frequencies are listed in Appendix 2. Some social work ethics
educators taught ethics theories utilising the code of ethics, whereas others drew on specific theoretical perspectives
such as critical social work, anti-oppressive practice and human rights. There were also a few educators who taught
ethics and law, either together as a subject or by linking ethics to legislation. Ethical decision making as an
overarching concept for framing the ethics subject was noted by a number of participants.
Table 6: The main concepts/theories used to teach social work ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Concepts/theories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Virtue ethics</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Results based utilitarianism, teleological, consequentialist</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Duty based, deontology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Human rights and anti-oppressive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AASW code of ethics in practice</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ethical decision making</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ethical theory</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Neoliberalism, global social justice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Theories of justice/legal context/relation of law to ethics</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ethics of care</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the analysis of curriculum content/weekly listing of topics, frequencies of some relevant terms in the whole subject outlines were counted to infer the emphasis in the curriculum. Table 7 shows that values and principles (perhaps in the AASW code of ethics), human rights and social justice were relatively more focused in the social work ethics curricula. There was minimal reference to terms such as virtue/s and character, and the term quality did not appear in the curricula. Alternatively, we also did not find any reference to Aristotle, though the topic of virtue need not be limited to this author. Indirectly, some virtue element may be captured under the headings of professional identity and professional integrity, but reference to those terms was also minimal in the curricula. The term reflection appeared nearly 100 times in the social work ethics curricula, suggesting its importance in practice, even from an ethical point of view.

Table 7: The appearance of virtue-related terms in the subject outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtues</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional identity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional integrity</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the terms such as virtues/qualities/character appeared least in the social work ethics curricula, in nine subject outlines social work ethics educators showed the linkage of the subject to their university graduate attributes (for example, respect, communication, problem solving, critical thinking, team work and leadership) and one subject outline also connected it to AASW graduate attributes.

**TEXTBOOKS**

The study also explored the main literature/textbooks used to teach such diverse social work ethics curriculum content. These data were analysed both from subject outlines and the questionnaire, as a specific question was asked to ascertain this information. In about one-fourth of subject outlines no text book was prescribed. In the remaining subject outlines 17 prescribed textbooks/reading materials were stated. In the questionnaire, social work ethics educators listed 56 main items of literature/textbooks they draw on to teach social work ethics. In both data together, literature/textbooks with three or more frequencies are listed in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The main literature/textbooks</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Dolgoff, R., Harrington, D., &amp; Loewenberg, F. M. (2012). <em>Ethical decisions for social work practice</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The long list suggested that social work ethics educators offered a vast array of texts and readings that they used to support their teaching across their ethics subject. These texts ranged from human service ethics, moral philosophy, law, social work and human service values to human rights. This analysis provides only a partial picture as, in most of the subject outlines, educators had included the prescribed and recommended reading list that consisted of textbooks, journal articles and websites according to weekly topics, which have not been analysed here. In one subject outline only philosophy-related references were found. The literature and textbooks listed were as diverse as the curriculum content (see Appendix 3). However, the analysis does provide a general idea about what resources are used to teach social work ethics subject.

**APPROACHES TO TEACHING SOCIAL WORK ETHICS**

As presented in Table 9, social work ethics educators used a wide range of 18 approaches to teach ethics to students. Three broad approaches may be identified. First, some provide a broad overview of ethical theories, critical reasoning and then move on to the AASW code of ethics, dilemmas and decision making. Second, some were grounded in human rights and social justice, anti-oppressive practice and critical theory and then focused on the content of the code of ethics. Third, some others focused on law, courts, ethics and organisational contexts. Although the depth and breadth may differ, most of them covered the AASW code of ethics, emphasising values and principles, ethical dilemmas and decision making. This variation may be due to the way subject curriculum is
constructed. As already stated, some offered social work ethics as a stand-alone subject, whereas others merged with social work theory or law, depending upon curriculum space constraints.

About half of the educators (10) taught the ethics subject independently, whereas nearly half of them (9) taught it jointly: one with a colleague from the philosophy discipline, another with some from the arts discipline and one taught with PhD students. The majority of social work educators (17) opined that an ethics subject may be taught throughout the course because it is a critical component of all dimensions of social work and it may be more effective for learning if done this way. Three educators thought an ethics subject should be taught at the beginning (first two years), prior to first placement, and four of them suggested at the end (last two years), as it may not make sense earlier. Overall, their teaching methods, practices, techniques and strategies included lectures/face-to-face teaching, group work with case studies, and reflective discussion of ethical dilemmas/themes.

Table 9: Approaches to teaching social work ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Approaches to teaching social work ethics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Present AASW code of ethics</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overview of ethical theories, moral philosophy and critical reasoning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Face-to-face teaching, groupwork with case studies, reflective discussion of ethical themes, drawing on concepts, literature and the AASW code of ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Present frameworks for resolving ethical dilemmas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teaching/knowing personal and professional values</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Foster critical reflection on link between moral philosophy and social work practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Promoting ethical decision making</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Online—engaging with students using various technologies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>No specific ethics course but ethics and social work values addressed in every course</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Grounded in human rights and rights-based practice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Modelling a principled and ethical approach to social work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teach critical thinking, critique moral viewpoints with case studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ethics part of broader/integrated unit including legal and organisational contexts, each a two-day intensive alongside placement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tap into personal and placement experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ethics as risk management and ethics/law</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Emphasising the ethics of care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Focus on the link between power and ethics, organisational context and dominant discourses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Attend lectures with interdisciplinary professionals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When they were asked to suggest the best way to teach a social work ethics subject, their responses revealed 20 best ways. One of the responses was that they would like to “find out one”, which suggests that there is no best way and it is challenging to teach an ethics subject. Keeping this in mind, different ways of teaching social work ethics may be seen in Table 10. Overall, most participants felt case studies offered students the ability to immerse themselves in practice examples to stimulate thinking about ethical issues and dilemmas in a way they had not previously done.
There were comments made around how the students benefitted from having to think about actual cases so that they could apply the theory and ethical frameworks to real people in situations of vulnerability. Coupling case studies with theoretical knowledge and reflective practice was common. A practitioner discussing practice, either as a guest speaker or the teacher discussing their own practice, was noted quite a lot. Raising awareness of own values of students is a crucial method of teaching ethics education. Some were of the view that the use of online environment, reflection, placements, activities around Indigenous Australians and challenging assessments facilitates ethics teaching. It was also important for educators to model ethical practice through their teaching, valuing the lived experience of students and not teaching specific ideological preferences.

Table 10: Best ways to teach social work ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Way of teaching social work ethics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provide real ethical scenarios, case studies</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Practitioner discussing practice</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Promote understanding of own values</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Embedded within the AASW code of ethics</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Link between theory and practice</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Awareness of frameworks/principles/theories</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Valuing lived experience of students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Assist/develop understanding of core theories</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Focus on ethical decision making</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Reflectively</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Modelling ethical practice through teaching</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Social work as part of multidisciplinary team</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Alongside placement</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Activities around Indigenous Australians, white privilege, power relations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>No specific subject but ethics woven into every subject</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Not teach to specific ideological preference</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Providing challenging assessments</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Online environment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Teach difference between ethical issues and dilemmas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING SOCIAL WORK ETHICS

As presented in Table 11, educators stated several challenges to teaching social work ethics. Some of these challenges may be attributed to students (2, 3, 6, 12, 16, 17, 18), some to educators (2, 4, 17) and some relate to resources (1, 10, 15). Lack of resources in terms of time, space and logistical issues, and dated reading materials was stated in seven responses. Too prescriptive AASW course requirements caused difficulty in fitting it all in. Prevailing neoliberalism focusing on fiscal outcomes appeared to have diminished the significance of ethics. To some educators the challenge of teaching ethics emanates from students not knowing what an ethical dilemma is, how to apply theory to practice and not understanding ethical theories. Clearing their confusion between decision making and judgement, and religious and moral beliefs with ethics, is also challenging. A lack of basic academic skills further contributes to the challenge. Online and international learners also pose other challenges. Some educators find it
difficult to help students identify their own views and lived experience and challenge/change them. It is also challenging to remain non-judgemental about a range of student beginning values and cultural differences, and be inclusive. Dealing with emotional responses to sensitive issues poses additional challenges to educators.

Table 11: Challenges in teaching social work ethics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Time, space, staff, up-to-date and relevant materials, logistical issues</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Helping students identify own views and challenging/changing them, student lived experience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of knowing what an ethical dilemma is or lacking capacity to consider complexity of a dilemma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Being inclusive and non-judgemental of a range of student beginning values, cultural differences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Supporting critical reflection</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Academic skills, reading, writing, critical analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How to apply theory to practice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Including wider range of values and virtues in the profession</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack understanding of ethical theories</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Course prescribed by AASW hard to fit all in</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Supporting ethical decision making</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gap between personal and professional ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ethical frameworks are for decision making in a socially contested world, not about judging other people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Confusing religious beliefs and morals with ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Neoliberalism focusing on fiscal outcomes makes ethics appear irrelevant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Suiting international and online learners</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Management of emotions with sensitive topics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Students consider the subject unnecessary, that the code of ethics is sufficient</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Teaching ethics as an everyday stance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address some of those challenges, social work ethics educators suggested 20 strategies, which are presented in Table 12. A combination of strategies such as the use of case studies, critical reflection, modelling, group tasks, debates and so on may be considered. Broader approaches of treating students as learners, a right-based approach, adapting materials to meet the need of learners and partnering with the industry/practitioners may be considered to facilitate better learning and teaching. There was one suggestion to use virtue ethics as a strategy. Most of these strategies relate to teaching methods and materials centring on educators and learners.
### Table 12: Strategies for addressing challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assessments and case studies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Critical reflection of the self and profession</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Modelling expected discourse and debate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Situating theory and literature within students’ personal/professional ethical values</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Group work or sharing with peers, teamwork applying a theory to a case</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fostering debate and critical analysis without first offering teacher preference, in an environment of trust</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Treating students like learners</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Adapt materials to suit course</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Providing models at beginning of course to give students an aim</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Thread ethics through content. Use Rossiter's view: social work driven by ethics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Weekly study topics on areas of theory, values, decision making</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Focus on rights-based practice as means to ethical practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ethics quiz focusing on AASW code</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Integrating academic skills into assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Constant reminders of ethical issues and dilemmas for practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Discussion with school leaders to instigate changes to logistical organisation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Guest presenters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Group rules</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Partner with the industry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Teach social work ethics as a “way of being”—virtue ethics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ASSESSMENT METHODS/PRACTICES

About 13 of the educators stated that they use case study analysis; a similar number use written essays; six use group work, including role plays and presentations; and five of them use reflective notes to develop self-awareness. The weight given to each assessment item ranges between 10 and 60 per cent. Further analysis of the outlines showed that six educators used quizzes and two used multiple-choice questions. The nature of assignments varied significantly. A small number used the AASW code of ethics to identify values and principles in it. A few educators’ assessments focused on identifying personal and professional values and how they impact decision making. A large number of essays focused on analysing a case study or a practice incident to identify ethical issues and dilemmas in it. Some essays focused on the application of ethical decision-making frameworks to identified ethical dilemmas. A few assessments included writing an essay on visits to a court or tribunal and a reflective note on development of one’s own philosophy of life and values. A couple of them covered organisational context, theoretical essays on philosophy, and only one had a two-hour written examination. It may be reasonable to infer that none of the educators focused directly on development of virtues, qualities or character, though in some respects they may indirectly contribute to development of some virtues as part of professional socialisation.
CREDIT ARRANGEMENT FOR THE SOCIAL WORK ETHICS SUBJECT

Over half of educators (12) said that no credit was offered for the previous study. Six educators suggested the possibility of credit if the applicant had studied content that is very close to what is taught in the social work ethics subject, though this is unlikely, even where it is possible. Only one educator said their students do get credit for previous ethics subjects. Overall, it suggests that social work courses and ethics educators attach greater significance to social work ethics subjects than to ethics subjects generally.

COVERAGE OF VIRTUES/QUALITIES IN SOCIAL WORK ETHICS TEACHING

In addition to the analysis of social work ethics content curricula, we also explored whether social work ethics educators’ teaching focuses on developing character/qualities/virtues in social workers and how they achieve this in the classroom. If it is not covered in the teaching, is there any need to include it and how it can be done?

Less than one-fourth of the educators clearly stated that their social work ethics focuses on developing virtues/qualities/character in social workers and less than one-fifth of them taught by focusing on values. Nearly 10 per cent of the educators categorically stated that their teaching does not cover development of virtues/qualities and a similar percentage opined that it is an ideal that they strive for to some degree, but it could be done better. The remaining educators provided differing responses, which included focusing on social work ethics, professional integrity, pluralist approaches, qualities, knowledge and skills, ethical thinking, doing the right thing, and qualities, knowledge and skills. All those who responded to the survey do teach social work ethics. However, based on the responses, it may be inferred that about half of the schools do not focus on developing virtues/qualities in terms of attributes in social work ethics education. The majority of social work educators were of the view that it is necessary to have this perspective. Virtues/qualities have a role in social work practice and what social workers “are” is as important as “what they do”.

Respondents identified some of the teaching methods used in the classroom to develop qualities and virtues. These are: challenging students’ assumptions in relation to particular issues/values; asking students to explore what it means to be a good social worker; case studies; discussion on the use of self; modelling and applying professional values and ethics to teaching and their interactions with students and other staff members; being a good example and demonstrating the kind of public discourse and debate expected of students; civic responsibility and the exercise of good judgement; reinforcing the key tenets; creating an environment that models relationships that are respectful, assertive and considerate of each other; identifying what constitutes the qualities of a social worker who has integrity (and what the opposing qualities might be); online activities with questions; paper exercises with immediate practical application; reflecting on the values they drew upon to make decisions and what conflicts they experienced in this process, and what this might say about their own beliefs, qualities and priorities; seeing ethics as the value base that motivates practice; using examples and illustrations; comparing the code of ethics and human virtue and direction as a starting point; using language that is accessible; using examples from their own practice; emphasising the character of a social worker that is guided by the code of ethics; discussing scenarios; reflection; exploring ethical dilemmas and discussing alternative choices and decisions, pros and cons; relating the material to living out the core values of social work; watching DVDs (acknowledging and apologising for breaking of principles and harm caused) followed by discussion; and asking students to identify statements in the code that reflect different ethical perspectives—one of which is virtue ethics.

The above list suggests that there are a lot of innovative and creative ways of teaching an ethics subject that develop/strengthen certain desired qualities. Given that a majority of social work ethics educators in our survey thought that it is important to have a virtue perspective in social work ethics training, and about half of the schools seem to be missing such perspective, suggests that there is a need to develop and provide virtue-led practice training for social work and human services professionals.

This matched social work ethics educators’ response that nearly one-third of them did not differentiate among ethics, values and being, and nearly one-fifth of them thought they overlap or are intertwined (though about two-fifths treated them separately, which suggests some controversy around conceptualisation of virtues and values/principles).
The majority of social work ethics educators thought that it is possible to embed a lifelong commitment to the development of certain qualities in social work students. To achieve this they offered 17 suggestions, as presented in Table 13. About one-fourth of the suggestions emphasised professional development and quality supervision activities. Seven of the remainder focused on student-centred activities such as enhanced self-dialogue about values and responsibilities, seeking various forms of knowledge, engaging with the real world, connecting with alumni, peer support, self-care and holding to ethics of care. The remaining suggestions centred on educators teaching reflective practice, offering student supervision, developing a strong sense of history and tradition of social work, organising visits to inspiring institutions, introducing dialogical processes with students—including seeking feedback and encouraging them—cultivating student-centred approaches and developing quality curricula. A few educators were of the view that it is possible to develop certain qualities in students through socialisation, not only throughout the degree but also during placement and as a graduate. To one educator the development of qualities may enable students to understand the impact of appalling social work practice.

A minority of educators (three) thought that it is not possible to embed a lifelong commitment to the development of certain qualities because there is a portion of the social work students who come to the profession with hidden agendas. These people are not capable of change in their behaviours to allow them to develop the assumed positive qualities; for example, a sexual predator. Another educator doubted whether empathy that is felt inwardly by the student can be taught through ethics. In the third respondent’s view, there was simply not enough space in the course to impact personal development in this way. Two thought it is possible, but it is a difficult task.

Table 13: Suggestions to develop qualities in social work students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Suggestions to develop qualities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Quality supervision</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Develop personal self-dialogue re values and responsibilities around these values, develop an ethical and professional practice framework</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Be embedded in ability to reflect on professional framework—teaching reflective practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student supervision and personal development recorded in reflective journaling/workshop attendance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Developing strong sense of history and tradition of discipline of social work rather than merely the role/tasks/skills, meta purpose and meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Court and tribunal visits</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Sound dialogical processes with students, feedback and encouragement</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Student-centred approaches and empowerment of students</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Quality curriculum</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Importance of seeking various forms of knowledge</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Promote lifelong learning</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Peer support</td>
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<td>Connections with alumni</td>
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<td>Self-care</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Engagement with the real world</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Students should start and finish with commitment to ethics of care</td>
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</table>
The main purpose of this study was to find out whether and to what extent virtue ethics is included in social work ethics subjects and what social work ethics educators think about teaching virtue ethics. Towards that end, the systematic review of social work ethics curricula and analysis of views of social work ethics educators presents a mixed result. The data show that social work ethics is an important subject in the social work curriculum, as most educators do not offer credit to the subject if the applicant has completed a similar subject elsewhere. In social work programs the ethics subject is covered in different ways, which include a subject fully focusing on ethics, ethics combined with another subject or ethics integrated across several subjects. There was a great diversity in the social work ethics curricula, though most of the educators belong to the same generation in terms of their age and socio-political socialisation. Why is there such diversity in the curricula? Perhaps each educator’s knowledge base, ideology and preference for a particular topic varies. Despite such diversity, how is it possible to achieve uniform minimum ethical standards in practice? A great variance across ethics curricula may suggest a markedly different knowledge of ethics acquired by students and so there may be differences in solving ethical dilemmas and ethical decision making in practice (Borrmann, 2010; McAuliffe, 2010).

The analysis of subject outcomes revealed no explicit reference to the development of qualities or character of social workers, though some outcomes aimed to achieve reflection on their own and professional values, and personal and professional self, which may help develop the attribute of self-awareness and critical reflection. The act (quality) of critical reflection was clearly emphasised in the curriculum.

Limitations on the curriculum emanated from competing demands on the curriculum space, particularly when social work ethics subjects are combined with other subjects such as law, human rights and social work theory. Thus the balance of content can sometimes be determined by other pressures, such as what is dealt with in other places. Even if it is stated in the curriculum, it did not ensure that ethics was covered as much as it should be, as one educator stated (in a casual conversation) that she allocated just one lecture for ethics in the whole subject. Although a few subject outlines did cover virtue ethics, overall it appeared that virtue ethics did not find a reasonable place in the social work ethics curriculum. Despite so much diversity in the curriculum content, almost all subject outlines had a focus on ethical dilemmas and decision making, and the AASW code of ethics. In some respects, professional integrity mentioned in the AASW code has an element of virtue ethics, but that needs to be critically unpacked to see what virtues are covered in it and whether they still tilt more towards deontological orientations. To address the ethical dilemmas and to take appropriate decisions, purposeful virtue ethics input is needed, but seems to be mostly missing. Why are our codes of ethics still mostly dominated by deontological and consequential orientations? Contrarily, there is an argument for employing a pluralistic ethical framework that provides space for all ethical perspectives (Berlin, 2003; Hugman, 2005; Banks & Gallagher, 2009) not just duty-based and consequential. Many other professions, such as medicine and nursing, draw on virtue ethics (Gelhaus, 2012; Radden & Sadler, 2010; Robertson & Walter, 2007), but why has the social work profession lagged behind on this? Often practitioners find organisational and legal contexts challenging, particularly when they contradict professional values and their own value base. Under such situations it is virtue ethics that gives strength to them to deal with those challenging contexts on a daily basis because cultivation of certain qualities helps them to better understand and intervene in those challenging contexts.

Perhaps, recognising this, most of the social work ethics educators were of the view that it is necessary to have a virtue ethics perspective and virtues/qualities have a role in social work practice, irrespective of whether or not they covered virtue ethics in their teaching. Most of them also believed in the feasibility of embedding a lifelong commitment to the development of certain qualities in social work students. This opens up opportunities for social work ethics curriculum designers and the code enactors to incorporate virtue ethics perspectives. Further curriculum development may need to be undertaken towards achieving this.

As the term “virtue” is understood in a number of ways, it is important to develop and disseminate a common conceptual understanding of virtue. As our conceptualisation of virtue combines values/principles, qualities and attributes, roles and functions, it becomes difficult and complex to categorically conclude whether virtue ethics is explicitly reflected in the curriculum or not. Evidence present in the analysis of social work ethics subject outlines.
and social work ethics educators’ responses to the questionnaire does not allow us to conclude that virtue ethics is not taught in the social work programs. Given that values and principles, reflection and the subject of professional integrity covered in the AASW code of ethics are related to the concept of virtue, and they are very much reflected in the curriculum, it may be that some aspects of the virtue ethics are partly covered in social work ethics subjects. On the other hand, we did not find an explicit focus on developing certain qualities and character or virtues, though some educators may be trying to do so without explicitly saying so.

CONCLUSION

This research had posed three research questions: What is the curriculum content of social work ethics subjects? What are the resources and learning/teaching methods used to teach social work ethics subjects? Is virtue ethics covered in the social work ethics curriculum and taught to social work students? The systematic analysis of the social work ethics curriculum and social work ethics educators’ responses presented in this paper clearly show a great diversity in the curriculum content, textbooks used, teaching methods followed and assessment methods/practices. Despite this diversity, the greatest commonality was the focus on ethical dilemmas and decision making and the AASW code of ethics. As our conceptualisation of virtue included the integration of values/principles, qualities and attributes, roles and functions, the curriculum explicitly reflected values and principles and some qualities such as critical thinking and reflection, but the same was not true in relation to certain qualities and character. A small number of educators clearly stated that they do not cover virtue ethics in their curriculum and teaching, and that more needs to be done. However, a great majority of the educators were of the view that it is necessary to have a virtue ethics perspective and virtues/qualities have a role in social work practice. These results have important implications for the revision of the social work ethics curriculum and the code of ethics, and preparation of future social workers.

However, these findings and conclusions need to be read while keeping in mind some of the limitations of the study. Social work ethics subject outlines/curricula do not provide a full picture of what and how social work ethics is taught and our analysis fully relies on what is explicitly stated in the curriculum. It is a qualitative analysis and we only looked at the curriculum from the point of view of whether virtue ethics is covered in it. In that process we might have missed some other important elements of the curriculum. Some questionnaires were completed sincerely and seriously, whereas some others came in with short responses and some after a lot of persuasion. So there was a great variance in the quality of responses. Social work students as recipients of ethics training were not included in our research. Future research may need to focus on further in-depth analysis of social work ethics subjects, moving beyond subject outlines. Rather than a questionnaire, interviews with educators may offer deeper insights. Specific questions on the AASW code of ethics may be pertinent. It is also important to include social work students’ views and learning experiences about virtue ethics. These limitations and suggestions for future research notwithstanding, we believe we were able to address our research questions and objectives. We hope these findings, conclusions and implications of the study will be useful to social work researchers, educators and practitioners alike, and will help to prepare virtuous and flourishing social workers to serve better.
REFERENCES


Gelhaus, P. (2012). The desired moral attitude of the physician: (I) empathy. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 15, 103–113


## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

### CURRICULUM CONTENT TOPICS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum content topics</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Whiteness theory</td>
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<td>Indigenous knowledges/theories</td>
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<td>Working with communities</td>
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### Related Curriculum Content Topics

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**PRACTICE RELATED**

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<td>106</td>
<td>The relationships between social work theories and practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td><strong>KEEPING ETHICS ON THE AGENDA—RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROFESSION ETHICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>Promoting ethical practice in human services and social work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Curriculum content topics</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Working ethically with “involuntary clients”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>History and evolution of the international human rights regime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum content topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>The professional and organisational context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>Organisational and inter-organisational communication and change processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>Agency-specific knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Ethics in the workplace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whistle blowing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEGAL CONTEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum content topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>Administrative law, particularly procedural fairness provisions and appeal processes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal accountability, liability and negligence considerations for practitioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116</td>
<td>Legal dimensions and ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Identifying, accessing and understanding legislation relevant to human services and social work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>Understanding and engaging with courts, tribunals and alternative dispute mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>Legal and social work perspectives; legal principles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australian legal system; legal principles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Public sector ethics, and statutory human services and social work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protection under the law/guardianship and administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guardianship and administration; capacity; elder abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Families and children and the law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health/disability and the law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crimes and victims: criminal justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>The interaction of legal and ethical considerations in practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Curriculum content topics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>122</td>
<td>Ethics in social research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>The legal, ethical and organisational responsibilities and challenges for practitioners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>The macro environment of social work practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX 2**

**CONCEPTS/THEORIES USED TO TEACH SOCIAL WORK ETHICS**
*(CONTINUED FROM TABLE 6)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Concepts/theories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Moral philosophy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>History/evolution of ethics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Critical social work theory and reflexivity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ethical pluralism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Philosophical positions, e.g. western, eastern, Indigenous world views/postmodern</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Personal and professional social work values</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Existential questions around choice and responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Complexity theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Social work and self-care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Communitarianism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Meta, normative and descriptive ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Absolutism/relativism, absolutism/determinism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ethics of response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Informed consent, confidentiality, autonomy and self-determination without mention of code of ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mental capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hierarchy of ethical principles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Professional use of self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Person centred care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>The work of Bruno Latour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Any theories aside from defining ethics and ethical practice—ethics in other subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Prescribed Literature/Textbooks Stated in the Social Work Ethics Subject Outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Literature/Textbooks</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main literature/textbooks</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hugman, R. (2012). <em>Culture, values and ethics in social work</em>. Abingdon: Routledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral philosophy books, including Kant, Mill, Aristotle and Rawls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main literature/textbooks</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Social Work Toolkit</em>. Macmillan e-resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A CURRICULUM ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

School

Title of the subject

Stand alone or combined with other subjects

Outcomes

Refers to university graduate attributes

Refers to AASW graduate attributes

Refers AASW practice standards

Ethical theories

Coverage of AASW code of ethics

Appearance of specific phrases/terms in the curriculum:

- Reflective practice
- Virtues
- Values
- Character
- Qualities
- Professional identity
- Principles
- Social justice
- Human rights
- Professional integrity
- Relational ethics

Prescribed textbooks

Assessments

Comments/remarks of a researcher
APPENDIX 5

INFORMATION SHEET FOR SOCIAL WORK ETHICS EDUCATORS

Research Project: Virtuous practitioners: Empowering social workers

We would like to invite you to participate in an ARC (Australian Research Council) funded research project on virtues and social work practice. The details of the study follow and we hope you will consider being involved. My name is Manohar Pawar (mpawar@csu.edu.au; 0411693115) and I am a lead Chief Investigator of the project. The other Chief Investigators of the project are: Professor Richard Hugman (r.hugman@unsw.edu.au; 02 9385-2778) Mr. Andrew Alexandra (a.alexandra@unimelb.edu.au; 0383443863) and Dr. Bill Anscombe (banscombe@csu.edu.au; 0269332631). Our respective contact details are included in the parentheses.

Aim of the Study:

This project will explore the role of virtues in social work practice. Its three main objectives are: (1) to identify and analyse core virtues of professional social workers; (2) to explore whether and how social workers develop and apply virtues in their practice; and (3) to develop approaches to cultivating core virtues in their (professional) socialisation so as to ensure better outcomes from the profession for its clients and communities.

Selection and Requirement:

We have selected you to participate in the project because you are involved in teaching social work ethics to social work students. Your participation in the project involves completing a questionnaire, which may take about 60 minutes, and sharing a copy of the social work ethics curriculum you follow to teach social work students.

Research Method and Process:

The research project will mostly follow the qualitative research method, though some quantitative variables will be covered. A researcher will approach you through an email or a postal mail and ask you to complete a questionnaire and mail back the completed questionnaire with a copy of the social work ethics curriculum you follow to teach/train social work students in a reply paid envelope. Responding to this survey may take approximately 60 minutes. Two weeks time will be given to complete the survey.

Completed questionnaire and the curriculum will be analysed according to the research objectives by employing suitable research analysis methods. Scholarly material will be used with appropriate citations.

Participation in this project is voluntary. You may withdraw from the project at any time prior to completion of the project and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to participate or withdraw at any time. Please note that once the completed questionnaire and the curriculum are submitted for analysis, these data cannot be withdrawn. Completed questionnaires will not be identified with any names, thus the confidentiality of respondents will be maintained.

The completed questionnaires and the relevant data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s office. The research project will be implemented over a period of three years from 2014 to 2016 and after that data will be stored for a period of five years and then they will be destroyed according to the ethical guidelines.
Research Outcome:

Analysed data will be used for research training, policy and publication purposes. The results also may be presented at conferences. We intend to publish the results in a monograph form or published book form and/or in a journal article form. In whatever form it is written and published, a copy will be deposited at the CSU library and you are welcome to access it at the library.

Research Funding:

This research project is funded by the Australian Research Council (DP140103730).

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University.

If you would like more information, please contact:

Prof. Manohar Pawar
School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Charles Sturt University
Locked Bag 678, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 2678, Australia
Tel: +61 2 693 32497 or 0411693115
Email: mpawar@csu.edu.au
or

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact me or the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

The Executive Officer
Ethics in Human Research Committee
Academic Secretariat, Charles Sturt University
Private Mail Bag 29, Bathurst, NSW, 2795
Tel: +61 2 6338 4628; Fax: +61 2 6338 4194
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for considering this request. If you are voluntarily willing to participate in this project, please sign the attached informed consent form.

Regards
Manohar Pawar
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL WORK ETHICS EDUCATORS

Research Project: Virtuous practitioners: Empowering social workers

Please circle the appropriate response.

I, …………………………………………… (participant name, please print), have read the information contained in the Information Sheet about the above research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. Yes / No

I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time prior to completion of the project. Yes / No

I agree that research data gathered from me may be published without identifying information and may be used for training and further research purposes. Yes / No

I agree to complete the questionnaire and to researchers analysing the data without identifying information. Yes / No

I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:
The Executive Officer, Ethics in Human Research Committee
Academic Secretariat, Charles Sturt University
Private Mail Bag 29, Bathurst, NSW, 2795
Tel: +61 2 6338 4628, Fax: +61 2 6338 4194
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au
Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

………………………………. …………………………………. ………………………………….
Participant  Signature  Date
QUESTIONNAIRE TO SOCIAL WORK ETHICS EDUCATORS

No identifying information is needed.

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this project. Before completing this questionnaire, please go through the project information sheet first. If you have any further questions or need clarifications, we would be pleased to provide. Please sign the attached informed consent form and attach with the completed questionnaire. We would appreciate your responses to the following questions. Please expand the space, if needed. We would appreciate it if you share your social work ethics curriculum along with the completed questionnaire.

1. What is/are the main literature/text books you draw on to teach social work ethics to social work students?
2. What is your approach to teaching social work ethics to social work students?
3. What are the main concepts/theories you draw on to teach social work ethics to social work students?
4. In your view, what is the best way to teach social work ethics to social work students?
5. What are the main challenges in teaching social work ethics to social work students?
6. How do you deal with those challenges?
7. Does your social work ethics teaching focus on developing character/qualities/virtues in social workers?
8. If yes, how do you achieve this in the classroom teaching?
9. If your social work ethics teaching does not focus on developing character/qualities/virtues in social workers, do you think there is a need to do this?
10. If yes, how can it be done?
11. If no, why is it not necessary in social work ethics teaching to social work students?
12. In your view, what is the role of virtues/qualities in developing good practice in social work?
13. Some people are of the view that ‘what social workers are’ is as important as ‘what they do’. What is your view on this?
14. As a social work ethics educator, do you differentiate ethics, values and being or you treat them as same?
15. What assessment methods do you use in social work ethics subject (for example, paper assessment, prac-based assessment, case studies, etc)?
16. Whether the social work ethics subject should be taught in the beginning years or at the final year in the course? Or it should be taught throughout the course?
17. Do students receive credit for a social work ethics subject because they completed a similar subject earlier?
18. Do you think it is possible to embed a lifelong commitment to the development of certain qualities in social work students?
19. If yes, what are your suggestions to do it?
Professional background information

20. Professional qualifications:
(Note actual qualifications: e.g. BA, BSW, MSW, Diplomas and certificates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Institution/University</th>
<th>Year (if readily given)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. How long have you been teaching social work ethics to social work students?

22. What is your disciplinary background?

23. Do you teach social work ethics independently or jointly with another disciplinary colleague? Please provide brief details.

24. Whether the Social Work Ethics subject is a standalone subject or whether it is distributed across a group of subjects in the social work program?

25. If it is distributed across group of subjects, what are those subjects?

26. Whether the social work ethics subjects are different at Master of Social Work (professional qualifying) and Bachelor of Social Work levels?

27. Are you a member of the AASW?:

28. State: (e.g. NSW)

29. Age: (record actual completed years)

30. Gender:

31. Rural/urban:

32. What motivated you to participate in this research?

33. What do you think of this research project?