

"Perhaps?" and "Depends!"

The Possible Implications Of Disaster Related Community Development For Social Work

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Abstract

The integration of community development as a field of social work practice into disaster management and response is occurring globally. While community development is often undertaken in divergent environments, its role and practice in a post-disaster context is a relatively new and unexplored field that can create particular tensions and challenges. There are complexities of scope, context, mandate and role for community workers, and often education and training experiences do not prepare people well for this new environment.

In this article we have responded to the question of whether the experience of disasters and recovery link social work back to its community work and community development identities. Our response to the question is crafted by the findings from a research project examining a statewide post-flood recovery program, and the experiences of community development officers (CDOs) employed to support communities in their recovery efforts

following the floods and cyclones that devastated the state of Queensland in Australia, in 2011. The conclusion we draw to the question posed by this special edition is that responses to disaster and recovery work certainly have the *potential* to link social work back to its CD identity. However, we contend that there are two more fundamental issues that first need to be engaged with. While disaster response may provide an opportunity for social work to re-engage with its community roots, we argue that firstly, attention must be given to how social work and CD are engaging with each other in a broader sense. Secondly, there are questions of how social workers are engaging in disaster response contexts and why they are largely absent from disaster responses – at least in the present research. The conclusion is that *perhaps* social work can be linked back to its CD identity – but it *depends* on the outcome of these two considerations and how we imagine the implications of these conversations for the social work and community development curriculum.

Introduction

This article engages with the theme of disaster-related community development (CD) to address the question posed in the special edition of this journal, namely, “whether the experience of disasters and recovery link social work back to its community work and community development identities?” To respond to this question we draw upon an empirical study into CD and disaster recovery work in Australia, and combined 13 years as university teachers of CD within a university school of social work, and our combined 45 years of community practice. Through the analysis and discussion that follows, we suggest that the complex answer to this question is, “perhaps, and depends”.

We draw upon qualitative research into the experiences of community development officers (CDOs) employed to support communities in their recovery efforts following the

floods and cyclones that devastated the state of Queensland in Australia, in 2010-2011.

While social and human service workers have had a long history of responding to emergencies, according to Ife (2013) the role and practice of CD in a post-disaster context is a relatively new field, with particular tensions and challenges. There are complexities of scope, context, mandate and role that face workers. We contend that education and training experiences often do not prepare people well for this new environment.

In considering the uptake of CD in response to disasters (at least within Australia), we argue that there are several challenges relating to social work identity and education. Firstly, most CD workers are not social workers, so the issues arising from the disaster response field are not *necessarily* going to influence social work. Secondly, even *if* the issues arising from a disaster context invited a CD response, and *if* social workers were employed as community workers, most university educated social workers would have little access to CD within their practice due to its marginalisation within the social work curriculum.

With the above argument in mind, our position is that CD flourishes under certain conditions. Or, more accurately, different traditions of CD (Westoby & Hope-Simpson, 2011) flourish under different conditions. Conservative forms of CD tend to flourish under programmes that offer self-help, self-sufficiency or therapeutic logics (Gilchrist, 2004, p.24). This kind of CD might well flourish under current Australian socio-political orders in their response to disasters. For example, the current Australian National Strategy for Disaster Resilience asserts that, “Fundamental to the concept of disaster resilience, is that individuals and communities should be more self-reliant and prepared to take responsibility for the risks they live with” (Council of Australian Governments, 2011). Social workers versed in a conservative tradition of CD would do well within this framing of self-reliance, responsibility and resilience.

In contrast, there are more liberal or radical forms of CD, with the former being more oriented towards advocacy and lobbying work (Gilchrist, 2004, p.24) and the latter being more oriented towards challenging social norms and logics of governmentality, for example those challenging dispossession in the name of development potentially triggered by disasters. These liberal or radical forms *might* also flourish, depending on the pre-existing conditions and consciousness of communities affected (Gilchrist, 2004) and if social workers were equipped with the analytical tools, practice skills, and capacities to accompany communities on such a journey – informed by what some call “radical social work” (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009) or anti-oppressive social work (Dominelli, 2002). However, as our findings and discussion suggest, under current conditions, this is unlikely.

Background To The Research

This article is based on a research project that focused on the series of natural disasters that occurred in Queensland, Australia, across December 2010-January 2011 and the CD program developed in response to this, called the Community Development Engagement Initiative (CDEI).

The devastation brought about by the 2010-2011 disasters was unprecedented.¹ Flood and cyclone-related disasters resulted in the loss of 37 lives² (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011; Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), 2011a; Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012). The Queensland Floods Commission of Enquiry (2012) reported that during the 2010-2011 floods over 2.5 million people³ were affected and some 29,000 homes and businesses suffered some form of inundation. Nearly 7,000 people were accommodated

¹ Historical records show that the events themselves were not unprecedented, but the number of people affected and economic devastation were not previously experienced.

² This figure is difficult to confirm. The QRA (2011a), the Department of Premier and Cabinet (2011) and ABS (2012), declare 37 people died. The Floods Commission Interim Report (2011) listed a figure of 35 deaths, with The Floods Commission Final Report (2012) giving a figure of 33 deaths.

³ Queensland’s estimated population as of March 2011 was 4,561,700 persons (ABS, 2011).

in 74 evacuation centres across the state, and over 45,000 properties were affected in some way (QRA, 2011b). The QRA has estimated the reconstruction cost to be in excess of 5 billion dollars (QRA, 2011b). By March 2011, 99% of the state was disaster-declared (QRA, 2011b). Additional natural disasters occurred in other parts of Australia at this time including floods in NSW and Victoria and bushfires in Western Australia.

This disaster created a sense of urgency that was exacerbated by the political climate of the time. At the inception of the CDEI in April 2011, Queensland was led by an increasingly unpopular Labor government, which ultimately went on to suffer a landslide defeat to the conservative LNP party in the March 2012 election. The performance of the then Premier, Anna Bligh, in managing the natural disasters, provided a much-needed boost to her popularity. This highly demanding political environment and the urgency surrounding Queensland's disaster recovery efforts ensured the CDEI was under pressure from the outset to get the CDOs on the ground and to be seen to deliver tangible results.

In April 2011, the Community Recovery and Wellbeing Package (\$35.82 million) was announced to support the human and social line of reconstruction (Department of Communities, 2011b). It was designed to “restore and strengthen local human services and community capacity, through provision of direct assistance to individuals and communities, and supporting communities to drive and participate in their own recovery” (QRA, 2011a, p. 30). A key component of this package was the Community Development and Recovery Package that provided 20 million dollars in targeted funding for two years (ending June 2013). The funding consisted of three components: firstly the Community Development and Engagement Initiative (CDEI) provided \$10.45m of funding to 17 disaster affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) for 24 CDOs and additional brokerage funds. The CDEI aimed to “support the recovery and well-being of community members through a community development approach which empowers them to manage their own recovery and plan for the

future” (Department of Communities, 2011d, p. 1). Secondly, LGAQ was provided with funding for a Statewide Community Development and Engagement Coordinator to administer the funding and manage the CDEI program. Finally, a Flexible Funding Program provided 9.37 million dollars in grants to 73 local government authorities to implement community recovery projects (Department of Communities, 2011a, 2011b). The large amount of funding and the need for public accountability created yet more pressures on the CDEI program and CDOs.

Community Development In Disaster Response

The literature on disaster response and recovery demonstrates increasing interest in the way that community, and its constituent local networks, associations and citizen involvement, assist residents to better prepare for and recover from such events (Chamlee-Wright and Stour, 2011; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008; Wyche, Pfefferbaum, Pfefferbaum, Norris, Wisneiski, & Younger, 2011). Disaster resilience, and particularly community resilience, is an idea that has gained significant momentum in the last decade as a way for policy makers and practitioners to identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of target populations experiencing disasters. Resilience as a social concept has its roots in biological and ecosystems scholarship, where resilience is seen as the ability of individual organisms and ecosystems to either ‘bounce back’ to their original form following a major disruption, or to successfully adapt to new conditions following a disruption (Gallopín, 2006; Hutter, Kuhlicke, & Felgentreff, 2013). CD is seen as one means by which such resilience can be fostered and enhanced.

CD, at least in its normative sense, assists citizens to band together and to utilise their collective power to effect change in the matters that affect their lives. This banding together can emerge *organically*, with people finding one another within their existing networks, or

alternatively it can happen *purposefully* with someone (paid or unpaid) taking the role of networking and inviting people to come together (Westoby & Shevellar, 2012). The latter course is the intention of the CDEI and the role of the CDO. Where CD differs from other approaches to change (for example, legal or market driven approaches), and from other social work practices (for example, case work and group work), is that the emphasis is upon collective action for social change. Within CD a key part of this process is the shift from what is sometimes understood as 'I' to 'We'. It is a critical shift leading to the *formation* of community (Brent 2009). Community is not simply the site in which activities take place but the means by which change occurs (Burkett, 2001). The traditions influencing practice (Gilchrist, 2004; Westoby & Hope-Simpson, 2011) will in many ways determine whether collective agency works towards more conservative outcomes such as self-help or more liberal or progressive outcomes such as structural change.

In order to explore the key concepts and shared understandings attached to CD in disaster recovery we took the theoretical frameworks of Caniglia and Trotman (2011), Gilchrist and Taylor (2011), Tesoriero (2010), Toomey (2009), and Webber and Jones (2012), and employed thematic analysis. In summary, what this literature suggests is that CD is a process that can: bring people to work together; assist people to identify shared issues and needs and respond to them; help people to discover the resources they already have; promote knowledge, skills, confidence and the capacity to act together; strengthen organisation and leadership within communities, and strengthen contacts between communities. In doing so it increases the capacity of communities to address local issues and engage with government and businesses in strategies that make a positive difference.

The literature suggests that when people are working together in this way they can take action to address inequalities in power and participation. Changing relationships between

communities and public or private organisations can help public organisations to work in more open and inclusive ways and promote increased local democracy, participation and involvement in public affairs. Assisting local people to learn about community issues builds understanding and a capacity to respond in the future and builds collective resilience.

Therefore the role of CD in disaster recovery can include: harnessing community based relationships in identifying needs and implementing solutions; extending the capacity of local people to provide their own services; using both local knowledge and outsider perspectives; and strengthening a sense of belonging to a particular place through maintaining and promoting community linkages.

These are all highly normative (and mostly conservative) roles, which explains the ease at which CD – and its various manifestations and interpretations – have been adopted. However, the extension of this is that without a clear practice framework, CD becomes unbounded and runs the risk of becoming so vague as to be meaningless (Bhattacharyya, 2004). The research of Webber and Jones (2011) is informative here. Their research into the role of CD workers in the 2009 Victorian Bushfire recovery concluded that because there was no collective definition or shared understanding of CD, workers were left to interpret their roles in response to community needs. While the fluidity of CD workers roles is not unexpected given the uncertain space and changing landscape of CD work, there are also limitations to understanding CD roles when roles are defined, analysed and categorised according to pre-existing frameworks. The present research builds upon this by focusing on how workers understand their roles, practice and identities, without overlaying a preconceived framework.

Method

To examine the roles, practices and identities of CD workers in disaster recovery, an interpretive methodology was employed, which utilised a mixture of participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Participant observation occurred during four regional forums across Queensland: in Moreton Bay, Lockyer Valley, the Tablelands and North Burnett. In addition to providing a space for introducing CDOs to our research project and recruiting participants, observation at these forums helped the researchers deepen their understandings of the CDEI and its employment of CD processes and thinking.

Of the 24 CDOs, 19 agreed to be interviewed. The majority of the interviews occurred between July and November 2012 (approximately one year after their roles commenced), at a time and place convenient to the participants. Most interviews were taped and transcribed. Interviews with CDOs occurred across 17 different regions of Queensland, the majority of which were in rural and regional settings. Nine stakeholders were also interviewed to provide a broader policy and practice context for the work. These stakeholders included line managers, state government representatives and professionals in the disaster management field. Documents from the Queensland State Government and from LGAQ provided additional history and context.

The semi-structured interviews were divided into two parts: the first part of the interview was aimed at understanding workers' orientation to, and history with, CD work. Alongside their individual histories and motivations the researchers probed for information on the key theorists, traditions and author-activists who may have influenced their work, and explored both formal and informal routes to their role.

Secondly, people were asked to reflect more specifically on CD in relation to disaster recovery and response, including their understanding of their role and their application of

resilience and recovery in disaster management. People were invited to talk about any tensions or challenges in their role, and what assisted them in their work. People were encouraged to share a story from their work to help ground the discussion in concrete examples and to show the connection between their theories and practice. A thematic analysis was applied across the interviews.

The research project received ethical clearance through The University of Queensland, and approval from the CDEI reference group.⁴ It forms part of a larger Queensland Centre for Social Science Innovation (QCSSI)⁵ funded research endeavour called *Identifying and evaluating factors influencing community resilience in a crisis*.⁶

Results

Three findings emerged from the study that have a direct bearing on the question of CD and practitioner identities.

Community Development Roles In A Contested Space

Firstly, in their disaster recovery work, most CD workers assumed one or several of eight clear roles in their work. These included community facilitator and supporter, network builder, capacity builder, arts worker, celebrator, infrastructure builder, cultural development worker and educator and trainer. These roles have strong alignment with a strengths based approach that Tseoriero, Boyle, and Enright (2010) describe as “enabling local people to

⁴ The CDEI reference committee was made up of the former Australian Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Queensland Department of Communities, Queensland Department of Community Safety, Queensland Reconstruction Authority, Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning, and Peak Bodies and Statewide Community Service Organisations, including LGAQ, Qld Alliance, QCOSS, Red Cross, Uniting Community Care.

⁵ The Queensland Centre for Social Science Innovation (QCSSI) was established by the Labor government on the 8th August 2011. The Centre was a collaboration with the Queensland Government and five Queensland universities to focus research on government priority areas. Support for the initiative was withdrawn by the Liberal National Party of Queensland following its appointment to power in March 2012.

⁶ A report on the complete research project is available from the chief investigator, Dr Peter Walters, at p.walters@uq.edu.au

understand their individual and collective strengths and resources and then to harness these for ongoing development of self and community” (p. 34). Such roles are commonly incorporated into the CD curriculum, reinforced by the content of popular introductory CD texts (see for example, Ife, 2013; Kenny, 2011; Kelly & Sewell, 1988).

However, alongside these eight key roles, were four other roles that were demanded of CDOs in their post-development work. These roles emerged in a highly contested space and demonstrate the complexity of CD work in disaster management contexts, and included acting as a translator and interpreter, evaluator, cultural mediator, and policy actor. Located within both local and state government structures, workers had to understand the difference between being a government employee and the community contexts many were used to being employed in. Workers acted as translators and interpreters between communities and their government employers, program officials and state office managers. They were required to operate in an environment of constant programme surveillance and accountability. They had to be adept at navigating various professional contexts and at negotiating the often implicit rules and norms of local government councils, of allied health professionals, of paramilitary organisations and of various government bodies as well as numerous community and professional groups. Finally, workers required skills in working both horizontally and vertically across organisational boundaries and hierarchies.

These four roles required of workers sophisticated skill sets in analysing the conditions of their work, contextualising practice and maximising personal and professional agency. In community work, analyses of power have tended to focus upon issues for those who are marginalised and the raising of voices of others. These findings suggest the need for also attending to how workers cope in modern organisational contexts and understand their own power. Issues such as mandate, power, fidelity and identity are central to such understandings. This raises questions of whether and how such skills might ever be taught in

social work and CD education. As Rosenman (2000) observes, human service workers initially enter the field driven by their desire to work with and help people, and find themselves unprepared for a world of competitive tendering, budgetary, financial and staff management concerns, and outcomes evaluation. This research suggests that social work curriculums could do a better job of signalling these challenges to students.

These experiences build on an analysis of the contested space (Hoggert et al, 2009) in which community practitioners work – between the state and community – which is a vital part of this emerging field of practice. There is often tension between what people in communities want and what governments and programme rules allow. We argue that while social work – and indeed CD – curriculums MIGHT give students a framework for taking on the eight strengths based roles outlined above, there is more work to be done to prepare students for the ever-compromised environments that they are likely to encounter in undertaking these roles.

Lacking A Clear Community Development Framework Makes Workers Vulnerable

Our second set of findings was that people adopting a CD identity (due to the formal job title and role description) did not actually have much understanding of different CD traditions (Campfens, 1997; Westoby & Hope-Simpson, 2011) and frameworks (Pawar, 2010) and had little or no knowledge of CD theory. Most adopted the organisationally deployed CD framework (in this case, a broad strengths based approach) without critique. For example, absent from discussions were critical analyses of the role of power, or adoption of liberal or more radical agendas (see for example MacLeod & Emejulu, forthcoming). In the absence of a CD framework workers drew upon their training from other fields, for example as arts workers or health workers, to help direct their practice. The consequence of this is at

least two-fold. In the first instance it meant that any kind of project, for example, a USB document storage project, was understood as a community development project. And in the second instance it meant that people's previous work experience and identity (as arts or health workers for example) defined what they did with the community, thereby actually disrupting orthodox community development practices. This is not to say that such projects were not valuable, it is simply to say they were the projects *workers wanted* to do and were not necessarily community-led.

The lack of a formal CD knowledge base or practice framework could be explained in part by the profile of the people employed by the Queensland Government to work in the CD roles. In terms of qualifications, ten CDOs came to the role with academic qualifications, however, only one CDO was formally qualified (Diploma of Community Development (TAFE)) with one CDO gaining a Diploma in Community Development (TAFE) after commencing the role. Over half (n=12) of the CDOs identified that they had no previous CD experience, although some felt that their experience in the community sector gave them an understanding of a CD approach. Previous roles held by the CDOs were also diverse and included employment as a prison officer, a game ranger, and a journalist, as well as work experience in the corporate and not-for-profit sectors.

We are unsure why, in a role specifically designed for CD workers, no social workers were employed. It may speak to the difficulty of attracting and retaining workers in regional, rural and remote areas (Maidment & Bay, 2012). It may also be that social workers do not see CD as part of their professional identity and exclude such roles from their work searches.

This is perhaps unsurprising given the marginalisation of CD within the Australian social work curriculum. Mendes (2009) observes that while CD is generally considered to be a core component of social work, much professional social work education and discourse

relegates CD to the margins. For example, at present the phrase “community development” appears only once in the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) 2012, as sub-point 2.2 1(a) of Guideline 1.1 Guidance on essential core curriculum content. Within these standards, CD is understood as essential knowledge of the *child wellbeing and protection* curriculum content. Furthermore, it appears as only one of a number of broad *knowledge* areas including, “child-centred and family-focused practice, strengths-based and solution-focused approaches, anti-oppressive practice, group work, community development, research and policy responses” (p. 13). It does not appear as a requisite skill set. CD appears, at least formally, to be positioned marginally within the current Australian social work curriculum and to be a minor part of social work identity. In this sense, we agree with Pyle’s assessment that, “social work's lack of emphasis on community organising is a barrier to social development in post-disaster situations” (2007, p. 321).

The absence of social workers from CD and disaster response positions may also speak to the (mis)understanding by local government of CD.⁷ There is a widely held misconception that CD relies on generic skills and does not require formal training or knowledge – but rather that anyone who is good at networking can do the work (Shevellar, 2011). There is a long critique of so-called soft skills development, including communication skills and relationship development skills as being little more than the dramatisation and mystification of basic social interaction (Elmes & Costello, 1992). Yet such a perspective ignores the sensitive and complex contexts in which workers are employed, and the ethical dilemmas of the multiple relationships endemic within the work. This lack of a clear practice framework and strong knowledge base, informed by a popular a-critical strength based

⁷ While the program was administered by state government, each local government authority had responsibility for employment and supervision of the CDO.

approach, can then easily run the risk of reproducing the interests of the elite and working with the most resourced in a community.

Moral Economy Of Disaster Response Language

Our third and final finding is the confluence of *moral economy* and *political expediency*. By moral economy we refer to how people's and practitioners' language is shaped by 'the production, dissemination, circulation and use of emotions and values, norms and obligations in the social space' (Fassin, 2009, p. 266). In this sense we argue that the moral economy of language used within the Queensland CD response is both shaped by, and also shapes, emotions, values, norms and obligations in particular ways. Of relevance to our argument is the use of language that privileges words such as recovery, trauma, and resilience which is indicative of a therapeutic moral economy and culture (Furedi, 2004) in which people's sense of self both influences, and is also influenced, by particular semantic configurations that foreground mental health issues. In such a therapeutic moral economy, counsellors are quickly deployed into disaster spaces, contrary to the expressed needs of most local people, who would prefer much more practical assistance. And social workers, more familiar with counselling or other therapeutic skills, might therefore feel more at ease deploying them, than drawing on CD approaches.

The political context is equally influential. The "blame game" is a common feature of disaster response (Boin, Hart, McConnell & Preston, 2010) and the 2011 Queensland floods were no exception. There was strong pressure on the state government to respond quickly and for there to be visible and concrete outcomes. These two issues combined to create an environment conducive to short term and outcome focused work. Many of the projects CD workers engaged in reflected this thrust and included things such as a USB scanning project, the production of pamphlets, books and guides, and one-off events such as concerts and film

nights. These were further emphasised by state government where an emphasis was placed upon the output of products and use of numbers of participants and events to gauge the popularity and reach of the work (rather than the quality of its developmental potential and longer term sustainability).

The implications of such a therapeutic moral economy, combined with political pressures, are clear in relation to the question this article focuses on. Both undermine opportunities to invest in normative CD responses.

Discussion

These findings are now discussed in light of the editors' question about disaster response, social work and CD. Reminding the reader of our introductory answer to the core question, we have argued for "perhaps, and depends". Our "fence sitting" position alludes to our argument that the experience of disasters and recovery link social work back to its community work and CD identities *depending* on the meeting of particular conditions and also, *perhaps*, if social work curriculum was animated by a stronger component of CD.

Findings from the research indicate that there are some crucial conditions that would enable social work to return to a more conscious CD approach. A return for social workers to CD would therefore depend on some, or most, of the following conditions being met over a sustained period of time within the policy-program-organisational nexus that resources, supports and evaluates CD work. These conditions include:

- an understanding CD as a long term process in communities. It is not an emergency response, but is part of on-going developmental work, so people have capacities to respond when there is an emergency;

- the location of practitioners within organisational structures that are sympathetic to their CD work;
- accessing appropriate external supervision, and developing peer networks;
- investing in *in-situ* training;
- having an auspice/host committed to a learning organisation; and
- disrupting therapeutic language, and recognising how discourses shape responses.

As discussed earlier, a key challenge is that the social work curriculum is tending away from CD responses. Where CD is taught it tends to be taught in a normative way, detached from the real life dilemmas that most CD practitioners experience. For example, CD might be taught as embodying the eight roles described, with little reference to the contested context in which such roles are practiced and ultimately compromised. Therefore, practitioners have little theoretical knowledge of how to navigate the tensions that they will inevitably encounter. This view is supported by Dominelli (2010) who observes that emphasis is placed upon what social workers do – or should do, with little emphasis given to the practical environment.

Filliponi (2011) notes that there are presently a number of barriers to the integration of social work and community work, including differences in theoretical background, differences in values and approaches, a lack of understanding of each other's profession and a lack of desire to be associated with one another. While some authors argue that CD is a distinct discipline with its own traditions and political philosophy, others describe CD as one method of social work intervention (Dominelli, 1990). Mendes (2009) argues that such constructions rest on false binaries of CD as inherently radical and social work as inherently conservative, when radical and conservative forms of both are practiced widely. Mendes observes that there are also calls for closer integration of the two disciplines based on the

assumption that social workers are committed to promoting social justice, that is, to linking personal pain with broader social and political structures and interventions.

The emphasis upon accreditation and employability also influences the placement of CD within the social work curriculum. There is a range of positions held by CD workers on the issues of professionalism and volunteerism which in turn influence their approach to social work. Many CD workers reject social work's reliance on professional discourse incorporating specialist knowledge and skills in favour of a more democratic relationship with communities (Kenny, 1996, p. 108). Within this frame CD is an identity that is professional, but is also inclusive of citizens and activists. From this perspective CD is, unlike social work, not a stable identity, but embraces space for new imagined identities and accompanied practices. Yet this too is a highly contentious area, with numerous countries moving towards the professionalisation and standardisation of community work (Chile, 2012).

There are also divisions within the two disciplines over how they construct the other. While some practitioners see CD as a key practice skill that should be utilised in most social work interventions, Mendes (2009) argues that the vast majority of social workers view CD as a specialist skill only to be utilised by those working specifically as CD workers. Such a position further marginalises CD within social work practice and education, and further explains the absence of social workers from the CD disaster recovery roles across Queensland.

Conclusion

In this article we have responded to the question of whether the experience of disasters and recovery link social work back to its community work and community development identities. By examining how CD has been practiced in the context of the

Queensland floods recovery efforts, what we have found is that responses to disaster and recovery work have the *potential* to link social work back to its CD identity. While disaster response may provide an opportunity for social work to re-engage with its community roots, we argue that first, attention must be given to how social work and CD are engaging with each other. For this agenda to be met, social work requires more engagement with CD and recognition of CD outside of the context of more familiar fields of practice such as child protection. Secondly, there are questions of how social workers are engaging in disaster response contexts. These responses would need to be held in tandem to prevent social work reverting to a therapeutic model. If those are the kinds of conditions, then there are also implications for university curriculum and CD identities, alluding to our answer of “perhaps”.

Alongside this we acknowledge the ever-present risk of further entrenching a more individually and medically/health oriented approach to social work, and potentially propagating an overly romanticised CD role. The danger is that in doing so, such approaches simply co-opt workers as government pawns positioned to placate community in a politically contentious environment, negating the progressive intentions of both social work and CD.

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