



Social work and the natural environment: Embedding content across curricula

Jennifer Boddy, Selma Macfarlane,
Leia Greenslade

Key points

- We must respond to the environmental crisis
- Our theory, values and skills good foundation
- Educators need to develop and embed content on the natural environment

Background

- Increased literature, conferences, groups on environmental, green and eco social work
- Codes of ethics (AASW, IFSW)
- Includes work in natural disasters; advocacy; environmental activism; food security and permaculture; community work; integration in assessment and intervention

see for example, Alston & McKinnon, 2016; Alston, et al., 2016; Boddy & Ramsay, 2016; Dominelli, 2012, 2013; Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2013; Helne & Hirvilammi, 2017; McKinnon, 2008; Phillips, 2009

Education

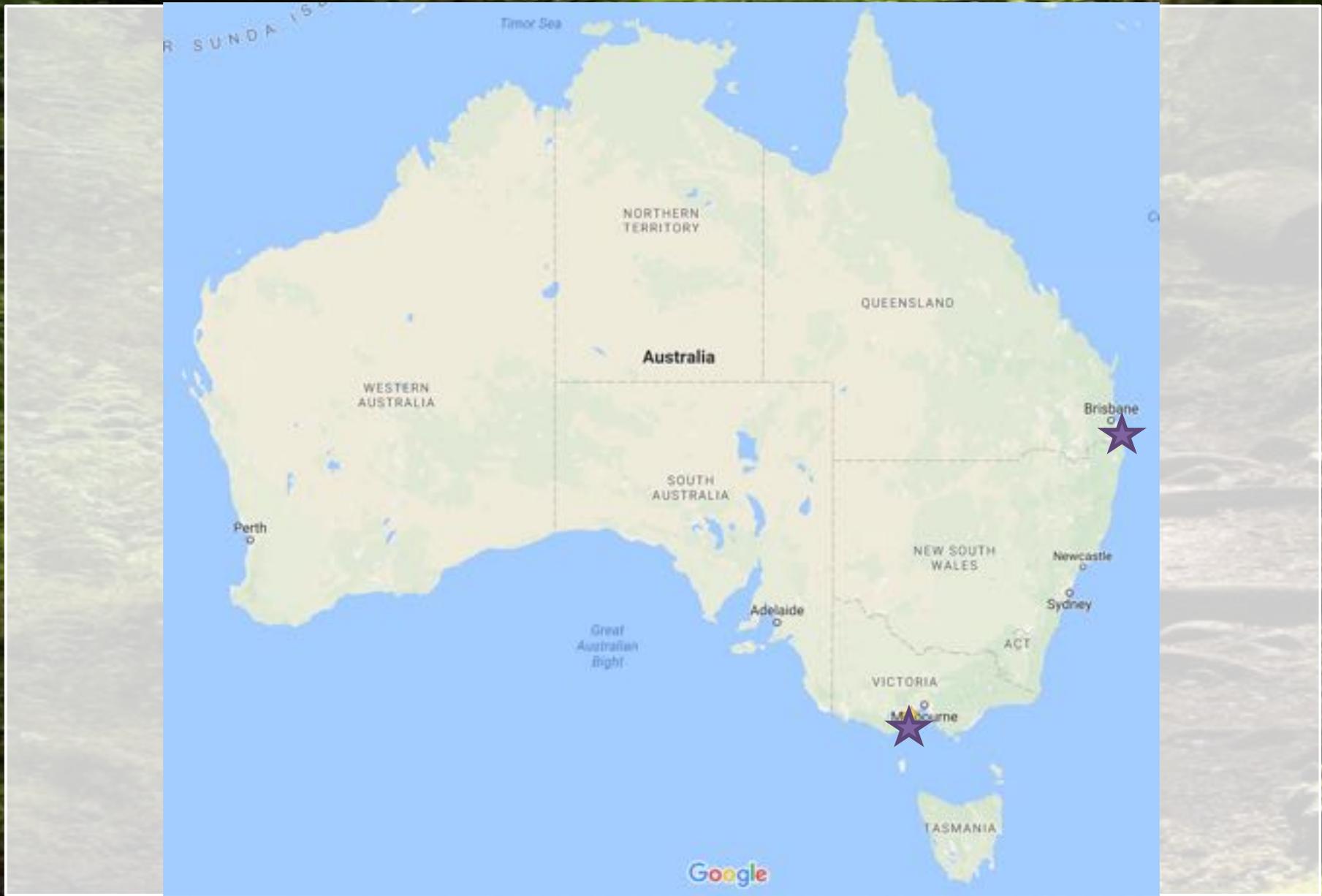
- Community development unit
- 6-week voluntary online course
- Simulation for disasters
- Field education

Boetto & Bell, 2015; Crawford, et al., 2015; Jones, 2010; Pack, 2014

- *Discreet units not always possible; embedding content also needed*

Two Examples

- MSW (Qualifying) online, with 20 days on-campus, accredited by AASW
- Two core units: (i) Deakin University and (ii) Griffith University
- *Responding to Trauma, Grief and Loss* (Deakin University)
- *Contemporary Debates in Social Work* (Griffith University)



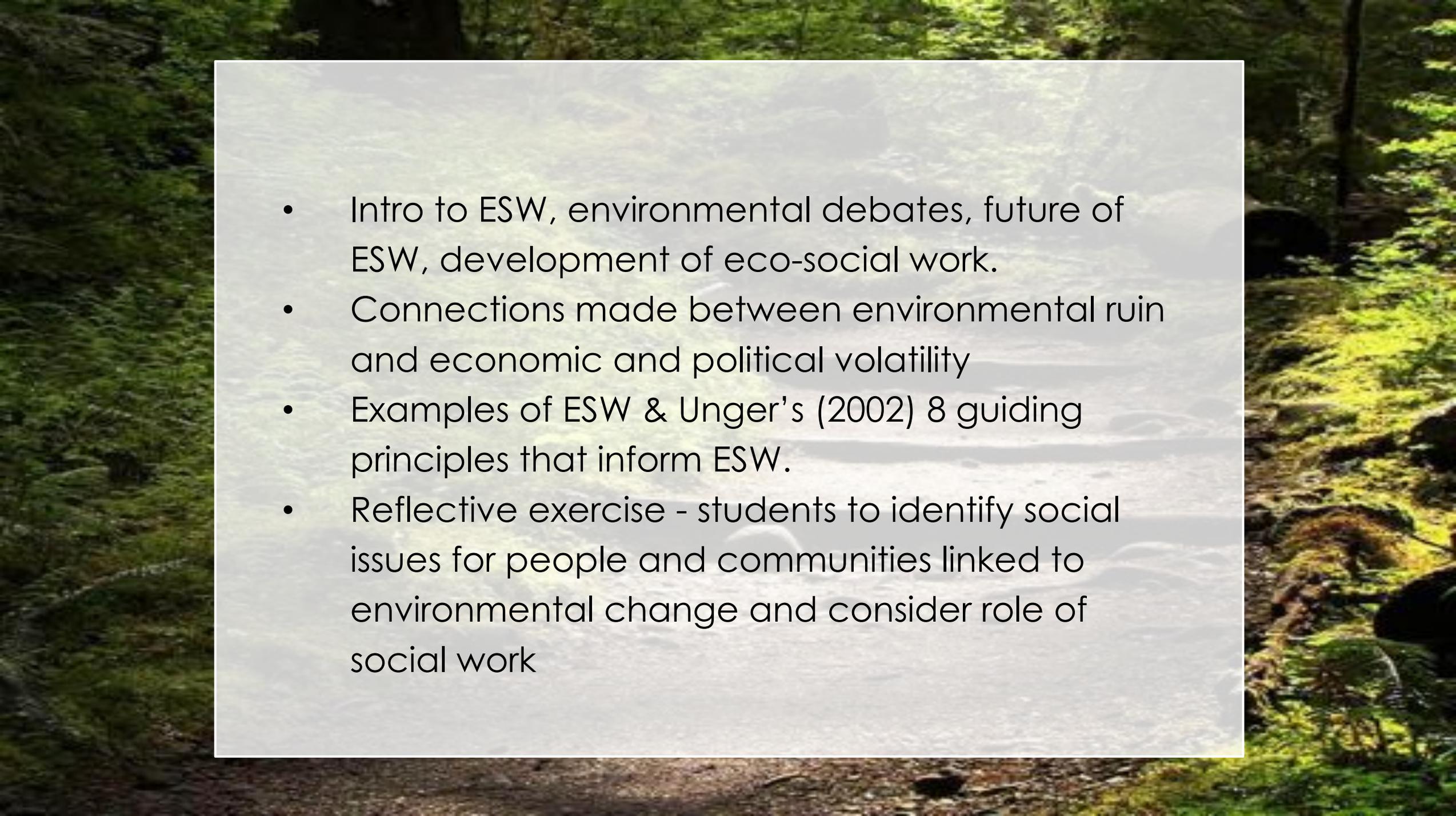
Responding to Trauma, Grief and Loss

- Premised on belief – trauma, grief and loss present across all field of practice
- Students engage in critical reflection on values, feelings, experiences and assumptions
- Content on natural environment integrated throughout

- Disenfranchised grief – e.g. loss of companion animal
- Empathetic failure – e.g. distress around the exploitation of the planet often trivialised
- Participate in experiential workshops - healing from trauma is connected to spirit, ancestors and country, embedded in the natural world; importance of Earth Democracy (Reynolds, 2011).
- Eco-assessment into practice
- Discussion around the deep losses associated with species extinction and loss of biodiversity (Yusoff, 2012)

Contemporary Debates in Social Work Practice

- Explores current directions & debates in social work, & social and political discourses impacting social work
- Text *Engaging with social work: A critical introduction* (Morley, Macfarlane, & Ablett, 2014)
- Aim - define environmental social work, outline the role of social work in environmental debates, and understand the impacts of environmental degradation and exploitation on people.
- Topic on Environmental Social Work (ESW), climate change and natural environment

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- Intro to ESW, environmental debates, future of ESW, development of eco-social work.
 - Connections made between environmental ruin and economic and political volatility
 - Examples of ESW & Unger's (2002) 8 guiding principles that inform ESW.
 - Reflective exercise - students to identify social issues for people and communities linked to environmental change and consider role of social work

Conclusion

- Existing content can be adapted
- Ideas on how to infuse content important
- Many more possibilities
- Social work educators need to review curriculum and identify how content on the natural environment and environmental justice can be infused in degrees

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