

How *Inclusive* is Field Education?
**International Students on
Placement**

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Background to the

- International students comprise 28% of university enrolments in Australia (Australian Government, 2010)
- Many social work schools are similarly contending with increased numbers of international students, and finding suitable placements for these students
- A lack of congruence between university equity and diversity policies and what happens in the workplace

Particular challenges faced by international students

- Learning and adapting to a new way of life in a new country
- Juggling learning and developing English language proficiency
- Studying in a foreign university
- Acquiring the discipline specific discourse

Arkoudis (2006)



But international students are a diverse group and these challenges are experienced differently

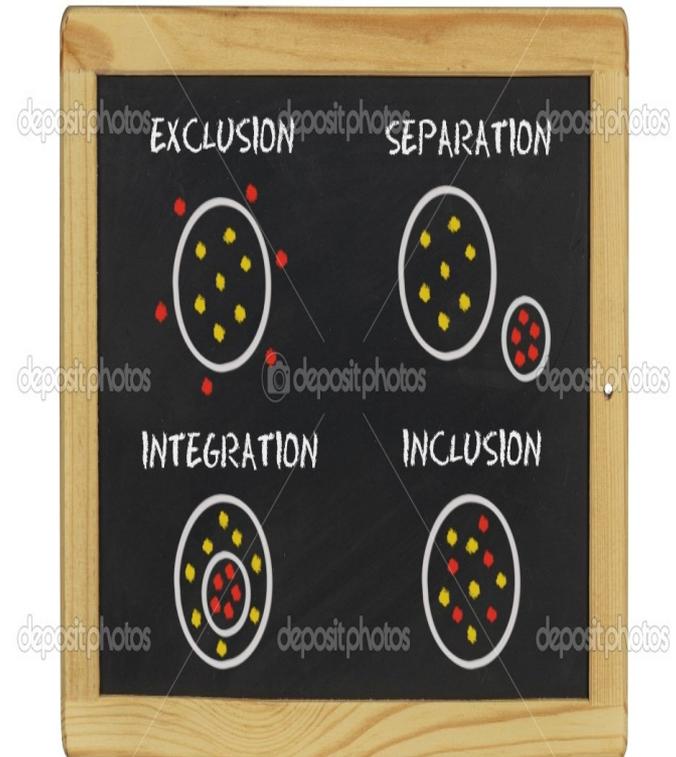
What additional challenges do international students face in field work?

More unfamiliar territory...



Inclusive Education

'Inclusion' applies to an arrangement where every student's entitlements have been designed in from the outset, as opposed to 'integration' which applies to the assimilation of students into a pre-existing arrangements. (Simpson, 2011)



Extending inclusive education to the field

- A tendency to focus on inclusive education in the classroom rather than in field education
- Field placements are an integral part of social work education
- Do we focus on making international students 'fit' with the field, or do we focus on assisting the field to be more responsive to a diverse student group?

The Project – Extending the terrain of inclusive education to the field

An exploratory qualitative study investigating the experiences of international students and their supervisors

- **Methods:**
- Focus group (9 international Master's qualifying students who had completed first placement)
- Semi-structured interviews (8 field educators who had supervised international Master's qualifying students)
- **Transcription, coding and analysis (ongoing)**

Preliminary Findings - Students

Students who reported positively on placement commented on:

- The importance of a good supervisory relationship
- The recognition of what they were able to contribute through their own backgrounds and prior work experience
- Opportunities for learning and building social capital

In general I love my placement...I learnt critical skills. I had many opportunities to work with clients to assess their needs...I also learnt about the client group and human services in Australia...Another valuable thing is social

Preliminary findings: **Contrasting** perspectives

- **International Students**
- Where is our money going?
- A double standard - one standard for domestic students and another for us
- Language is a barrier but it is also an asset
- **Supervisors**
- International students are 'more work'
- Shielding international students from case work
- Language is the main barrier

Where is our money going?



Because we are international students we pay heaps of money. Just for the placement we spend about \$7000. And the school is not very flexible with the placement and people's work...International students have to work to survive in Australia, which is high cost. (Student 8, Korea)

(Other students signal their agreement)

...And what I can't understand is where does that money go to? I mean we don't have any lecturer actually teaching us every week. (Student 8, Korea)

Focus group

And where students think the money should go

Student 8: *In some cases, the managers or supervisors don't care much about the students.*

Students 1 and 4: *Yeah, mmm.*

Student 7: ***If we can put some more money to the agency, yeah, I think it will work well.***

Student 8: *I mean there will be more funds for the university. I think there might be a commission to support us to focus on placement.*

Focus group



International students are more work

*There was not as much excitement in the office about getting an international student. Someone said to me 'what do you mean when we are getting an international student on placement?' There was an idea that **they were going to create quite a big workload.** (Supervisor 2)*

With casework...we basically wrote out the introduction and asked her to just memorise it...I am a caseworker from X agency. I assist people with blah, blah, blah...here is this form, what we do for you. (Supervisor 4)

Double standards or shielding students?

Because I'm an international student, that's why they did not bring me to the field work...Another student is a native speaker. But they bring her to the field work almost every day (Student 4, Cambodia)

*He didn't end up having a lot of interactions with people in the field. And **that would have been something that I would have mediated** to overcome those language difficulties. (Supervisor 3)*

Language as a barrier

*If they work in a hospital, it's not just their home language they are dealing with; they are dealing with English as a second language [and] they are dealing with 'hospital language'...**They are dealing with that third language, all those medical abbreviations. It's a crazy language; it's a third language that they need to understand.***

(Supervisor 1)

[Language] was identified as the number one issue for her...And that's what casework is, talking to clients...She could develop a good rapport with clients...but they couldn't understand her and how do you get beyond that?

(Supervisor 4)

Language as a barrier but also an asset

- *Language barrier is the most challenge for me, especially young people – they have their own language and their own kind of culture...So I could understand maybe just fifty per cent. (Student 6, Korea)*
- *As international students, **we are bilingual or trilingual**, but I don't think I get a chance to express this kind of advantage. (Student 5, China)*

A lack of taken-for-granted 'knowhow'

My colleagues like to have morning tea and so they sit together, casual chat...In the beginning they ask me questions during the conversation...But it's very hard to follow them and what they laugh at...And yeah, I don't feel very good in



Not knowing what the student doesn't know

*[In] most organisations...the **bonding and the teamwork** doesn't happen around just working on cases together but **morning teas and, you know, "What did you do at the weekend?"** And not all cultures put a lot of emphasis on that. [The student] might have found it surprising to be asked what did he do on the weekend,*

or he might not ask someone that...

And so the others in the organisation didn't quite know how to reach out to him, to join with them.

(Supervisor 8)



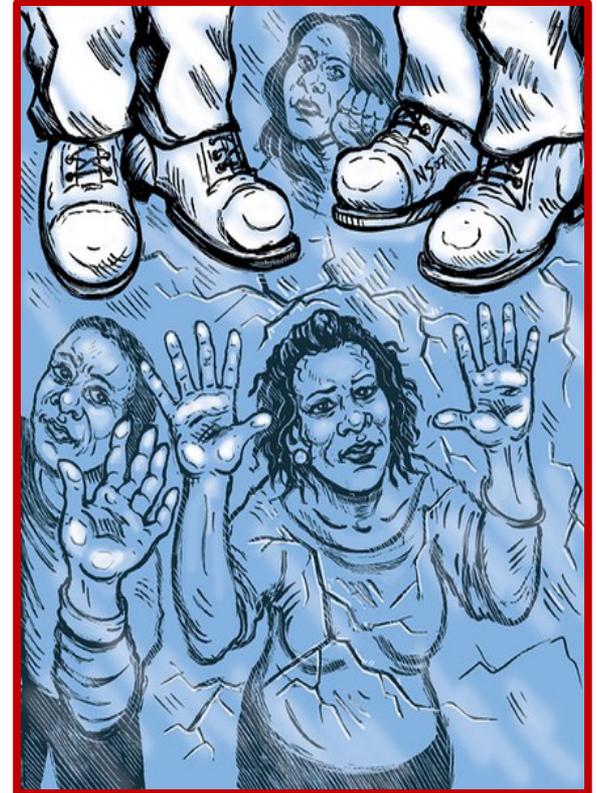
A lack of taken for granted 'knowhow'

*There was a person in a very bad financial situation... He owed a lot of money to Cash Converters. At the beginning, **I have no idea what is Cash Converters...** The coordinator observed me to see whether I can work by myself or not...when I talked about this with the client, she later told my manager that [I] cannot work with the client by [my]self...She recommended to my supervisor: 'Maybe you have to give him a fail'...Maybe cash converters for other people is common sense, but for me I have no idea at all. (Student 7, China)*



How inclusive is field education?

- Agencies themselves usually determine on what basis they will make room for diversity
- Risk of seeing international students predominantly in terms of a 'deficit model'
- Risk of students being segregated in the 'ethnic sector' of the workforce



Questions for consideration

- ❑ What are our responsibilities to international students on field placements?
- ❑ What are our responsibilities to field educators?
- ❑ How do we ensure that we don't succumb to assimilating international students rather than offering them an inclusive education?
- ❑ What are the implications for universities who rely on the 'goodwill' of agencies to provide student placements?