

ADVANCES

IN SOCIAL WORK

& WELFARE EDUCATION

Volume 19, No.1, August 2017

Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education

Volume 19, Number 1
August, 2017

Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education is published by Australian and New Zealand Social Work & Welfare Education and Research, C/- the School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Queensland.

Copyright © Australian & New Zealand Social Work and Welfare Education and Research

Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education is a peer-reviewed publication in the field of social work and human services. Only original research and development papers, selected reviews, and special reports are accepted.

ISSN 132-058484

Design: Inkahoots

CONTENTS

- 5 Editorial – **Marie Connolly, Charlotte Williams and Lesley Cooper**

Articles

- 10 Succession and Success: New Generation Capacity Building in Social Work Education Australia – **Amanda Howard and Charlotte Williams**
- 25 Strengthening the Knowledge Base: A Research Framework for Social Work Education – **Marie Connolly, Charlotte Williams and Lesley Cooper**
- 37 Teaching Research in Social Work Through Academic Practitioner Partnerships: Knowledge, Competency and Confidence – **Lynette Joubert, Lisa Hebel, Annaliese McNeill, Sarah Firth, Erin McFadden and Alison Hocking**
- 48 Leading Through Collaboration: The National Field Education Network – **Wendy Rollins, Ronnie Egan, Ines Zuchowski, Mary Duncan, Phyllis Chee, Patricia Muncey, Nicole Hill and Maree Higgins**
- 62 Field Education as Signature Pedagogy – Insights for Australian social work – **Shirley Ledger, Wendy Hillman, Bobby Harreveld and Darren de Warren**
- 71 Bringing Business, Community and University into Partnership: Innovation in Field Education – **Louise Harms, Kate Naish, Jane Stanley, Nicole Hill, Hayden Raysmith, Jan Thomas and Adrian Butera**
- 80 Leadership and Social Work Education in the Online Environment – **Beth Crisp**
- 92 The power of the case study within practice, education and research – **Monica Short, Heather Barton, Brian Cooper, Mark Woolven, Melissa Loos & Jan Devos**
- 107 Using Practice Research as a Strategy for Developing Academic Workforce Capacity – **Joan Rapaport and Jill Manthorpe**

New Voices

- 113 Field Education: Strengthening the Evidence Base – **Nicole Hill**
- 121 Democratising and decolonising social work education: Opportunities for leadership – **David McNabb**
- 127 Political Leadership in Social Work Education: A Reflection – **Darla Spence Coffey**

Guest Editors:

Professors Marie Connolly (University of Melbourne), Charlotte Williams (RMIT) and Leslie Cooper (University of Wollongong)

Advances Editors:

Dr Carole Adamson, School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Editorial Board

Associate Professor Liz Beddoe, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Dr Brenda Clare, University of Western Australia.

Ms Allyson Davys, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Professor Fran Crawford, University of New England, Australia.

Dr Johanna Finch, University of East London, England.

Associate Professor Susan Gair, Department of Social Work and Human Services, James Cook University, Australia.

Associate Professor Sue Green, University of New South Wales, Australia.

Dr Kath Hay, School of Social Work, Massey University, New Zealand.

Associate Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

Associate Professor Christine Morley, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia.

Dr Barbara Staniforth, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Aims and Scope

The journal aims to showcase material that is of particular relevance to social work, welfare and community development educators in Australia and New Zealand. Articles that present innovative or challenging approaches to current educational philosophy and methodology are particularly encouraged. The material should be original and professionally presented. A diversity of styles is welcomed, and reports on research from a variety of perspectives and research designs are particularly sought. Guidelines are available from the editor.

Editorial Correspondence

Dr Carole Adamson: c.adamson@auckland.ac.nz

Editorial

As the current Executive of the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (the Council), we are delighted to host this Special Edition of *Advances* focussing on Leadership in social work education. This edition is timely. In the midst of widespread and rapid changes at local, national and international levels, the need for critical leadership in steering a course through uncertainty, and in foregrounding innovations towards sustainable delivery, is singularly important. There has never been a more pressing time for dialogue across national boundaries and for connecting up the dots nationally and internationally.

Many challenges face the delivery of social work education that reflect the impact of the convergence of a number of global processes: the political consensus on neoliberal modernisation, technological transformations forged within a knowledge economy, new social mobilities and, latterly, the spread of populist political ideologies. All of these processes have rippled across the landscape of social work education producing shifts in higher education policies, raising the anxieties and competing expectations amongst various stakeholder groups about graduate capabilities, demanding engagement with new ways of working and new methodologies of teaching, and all within a climate of resource constraint.

In recent times, taking Australian social work education as an example, we have experienced the rapid growth of programs within a demand-led system that challenges the quality of delivery and the quality of student experience. We have experienced a radical change in the profile of the student body placing new demands in terms of support and pastoral care. Continued and deep contestation over curriculum content and incursions into pedagogic practices by a variety of stakeholder groups have become the norm as have the cries of “the field education crisis.” Social work educators are buckling under the demands for research excellence, quality teaching, industry engagement, internationalisation and entrepreneurship. It could be a recipe for disaster but somehow, it is not. The ability of social work education to adapt to, absorb and to drive change is ever present, if in varying degrees of balance. But we nevertheless have to pause and ask – is this enough?

The nature of these pressures have led the Council to debate the concept of leadership itself, to debate sustainable models of social work education and to ruminate on strategic ways of advancing the standing of social work within the academy. What might a flexible and sustainable curriculum look like? What innovative models of Field Education can sustain a growing and diverse student population? How can we best prepare graduates for work readiness? What should be the research priorities for developing the evidence base in social work education? And what can be said about the state of play of the social work education

workforce? These are some of the key questions that have preoccupied the Council. Across the decades, whilst we have seen progressive changes in deepening the value base of social work and in expanding social work theory and the content of the curriculum, there have been relatively few fundamental shifts in *how* we do things. Field Education is a prime example where the professional standards underpinning social work education are based on what has always been the case, rather than being based on sound evidence.

Our premise has been that, in times of adversity, innovation and alternative ways of thinking emerge and new trajectories are forged in how we do things. We consider that paradigmatic shifts in our approach that move beyond adaptation to the status quo are what is needed to seek out new and sustainable directions and to equip future practitioners to work with the dynamics of change.

Over the past two years, the Council has been focussing its activities on a range of ways of advancing leadership, including generating the idea for this Special Edition. Underpinning the Council's strategic agenda has been a focus on leadership in times of change, and two initiatives have been developed in response to this. The first was to host an international colloquium at the Monash Prato Centre where "thought leaders" in social work education came together in September 2016 to consider contemporary challenges and to advance the debate on social work education across global contexts. At least three of the papers in this special edition arise from what has become known as "the Prato moment." The aims of the colloquium were to progress cutting-edge pedagogy, spearhead international research and collaboration, advance social work within the academy, and equip schools of social work for 21st century practice. Along with international speakers, a number of Australian Council members presented at the colloquium, touching on themes of political leadership, research and development, educating global citizens, and capacity building in the academic workforce.

There are few such opportunities to bring together a group of international leaders in social work education, providing them with thinking space to reflect critically and strategically over a two-day lock in. The colloquium brought academics from East to West, in a catalytic moment where they enthusiastically tackled leadership themes across political, research, teaching, and workforce domains. People invested in the spirit of the event to explore ideas with no fixed or predetermined notion of where things might lead. Conversations flowed easily across recognised ground. In our collective reading of the runes we managed to move beyond the usual preoccupations with the impact of neoliberal policy trends, austerity and resource scarcity to try to reach those critical questions about change-making, political strategy, the potentials of international collaboration, succession planning, new directions in research and to question the frontiers of pedagogic practice in an era of rapid technological advances.

The Prato moment also noted the paucity of evidence and the relatively weak research capacity of the discipline, home and away. It was forcefully argued that one of the challenges for research leadership is to engage student enthusiasm and capacity for research, tackling knowledge transfer issues, engage with and shape "impact" measures, create academic environments where people can do their best work, tackling "wicked issues" via multi-

disciplinary collaborations in research and redefining and valorising social work research. One key observation of the Prato group was that, as social work academics, we tended to be *genetically critical towards ourselves*. This has implications, and in some ways illustrates a lack of maturity and disciplinary confidence. Being kinder and more constructive to each other in peer review and research assessment exercises is vitally important to the status of the discipline in the academy and the advancement of the discipline more generally. Failing to recognize this ultimately weakens the profession, and we lose good people with potential who might otherwise have made a difference in social work education.

The second major strategic initiative of the Council relates to workforce stressing the importance of “succession planning” in social work education in Australia. In advancing leadership the Council has been mindful of the need to build future academic leadership. A number of challenges face social work education in relation to its academic workforce, including recruitment to senior-level positions, the profile and sustainability of the discipline within the academy, research capacity and the building of the evidence and knowledge base of the discipline. The career trajectories, of women in particular, have been of concern. There have been few studies in Australia focussing on the nature, experiences and status of social work academics, but much commentary. The Bradley Review (2008) on the shortage of Australian academics and researchers reverberated across social work and the discussion papers underpinning the 2012 ASWEAS noted the need for concerted efforts to build capacity for the future. A broad sweep of issues are attendant on such succession planning, the core elements of which raise questions about the sustainability of the discipline both in research capacity, career progression and leadership. The Council recognises that Australia is not an outlier by comparison with other nations in this respect, but also notes that, to date, there has been little systematic effort to address what are known issues confronting the discipline. Following on from the colloquium, the Council is advancing a major capacity-building project over three years that will consider the state of play within the discipline, exploring with key stakeholders the constraints and enablers that affect them. The project aims to identify mechanisms to strengthen research capacity in the discipline and to build the infrastructure and processes to facilitate new generation leadership. The establishment of a National Field Education Network in Australia and its identification of six key areas for change is one such development.

The papers in this special edition respond to many of these contemporary issues, also demonstrating a range of important new directions that interestingly take us beyond “content” (we need more of this or more of that in the curriculum) to consider processes that advance education. These include collaboration, partnership, building capacity, strategic audit, strengthening the evidence base, and the ratcheting up of influence and advocacy. We begin the special edition with two Council initiatives. First, Amanda Howard and Charlotte Williams focus our attention on workforce leadership. Amanda and Charlotte, the academic leads on the Council’s strategic workforce initiative, raise important questions about Australian succession planning in social work education, the sustainability of programs, and the broader reproduction of the discipline. They explore the key issues in building a strong academic workforce, and challenge us to develop a comprehensive plan for capacity building that will support the future strength of social work and social work education.

Next, Marie Connolly, Charlotte Williams and Lesley Cooper turn our focus to research, and in particular, the strengthening of the knowledge base for social work education. Drawing upon discussions from the Council's strategic workshops, they create a research framework for Australian social work education that begins to identify the gaps in research knowledge and proposes a systematic approach to research planning across service user, academic workforce and institutional system domains.

Continuing the research theme, Lynette Joubert and her colleagues then illustrate the ways in which practice research in health settings can provide opportunities for engaging students and practitioners in "real world" research as a key to building sustainability for the discipline. This article, and Joubert's innovative mentoring of students and practitioners over many years, illustrates the ways in which writing partnerships have the potential to create research that is critically relevant to practice.

Given the pressures inherent in the delivery of field education, we are particularly delighted that a number of authors have contributed to this area of scholarship in the special edition. The establishment of a National Field Education Network in Australia has been an important development under the auspices of ANZSSWER. Wendy Rollins and her colleagues discuss the evolution of this initiative, and its focus on six key areas for change from a national perspective. This kind of leadership is critically important as social work field education across the globe is experiencing significant pressure. Next, Shirley Ledger and her colleagues explore the attribution of signature pedagogy status to field education. Examining the literature, they note an absence of Australian perspectives and contexts, reinforcing the importance of both research and theory development in this area. In the third focusing on field education, Lou Harms and her colleagues illustrate the important ways in which new opportunities can be created for students that extend beyond traditional social work settings. Recognizing the contemporary challenges in securing field education placements, they discuss a fieldwork model that brings together a business, community and academic partnership that create mutual benefits and opportunity.

Turning our attention to teaching and pedagogy, Beth Crisp looks at leadership and social work education in the online environment. Beth persuasively argues that traditional distinctions between distance education and the delivery of on-campus social work education are increasingly questionable in the contemporary environment where online technologies are used more frequently in teaching across modes of delivery. She challenges us to focus on the quality of learning outcomes and to remain open to opportunities that online pedagogical innovation provide. This is followed by a discussion of the integrative use of case studies in research, practice and education. In this article, Monica Short and her colleagues promote the use of case study as a powerful reflexive and reflective tool that engages students, and social workers more broadly, with the ethical realities of field practice.

In this special edition we also have a set of brief articles that explore new and interesting ideas across the various domains of social work education. These also touch on similar themes of workforce, research and social work pedagogy. The first, by Joan Rapaport and Jill Manthorpe, provides a thoughtful exploration of the value in encouraging practitioners

to undertake doctoral studies as a strategy for strengthening the social work workforce, both in relation to benefiting practice systems, and increasing leadership within and beyond social work. Nicole Hill continues the theme of research, and in particular, research innovation in field education. Nicole describes a project that aims to utilize anonymised administrative data to better understand student experiences, pathways, and academic progress of students on placement. She argues that the better utilization of administrative data has the potential to strengthen program and curriculum development.

David McNabb then explores the nature of democratizing and decolonizing practices in social work education. Drawing on elements of democratic theory, David notes the lack of research relating to how issues of equity, service-user participation, and cultural self-determination are given effect to in social work education. He challenges us to operationalize democratizing and decolonizing ideas within practice across our academic programs and systems.

Bringing the special edition to a close, Darla Spence Coffey then provides us with a reflection on political leadership, and in particular, leadership in troubling times. Darla promotes the need to equip students for negotiating the political environment of practice and to the ways in which, within the contemporary challenging political environment, we might maximise “collective impact” to good effect.

When we made the call for articles that might advance cutting-edge pedagogy, signal innovative research and/or generate innovations through strategic collaboration, we looked to leaders, however defined, to show the way. We have not been disappointed. Leaders are good spotters; spotters of key trends, spotters of small ideas that lead to big innovations; spotters of talents and of mobilising the critical combination of ideas and talents towards productive outcomes. It is clear that we cannot afford to be reactive, inert or continue to absorb widespread change without question or resistance. In this era of great political instability we need to Think Big. There is a pressing need to take forward strategic agendas that shape the future of social work education that is sustainable, effective, coherent and carefully benchmarked cross-nationally to allow for portability and transferability of knowledge, skills and values. This will mean taking risks, trialling new initiatives – evaluating and learning from mistakes. It will mean embracing conflict as a critical and creative force for change and it will mean stepping forward confidently as a discipline and exploiting spaces of influence.

**By Marie Connolly,
Charlotte Williams
and Lesley Cooper.**

Succession and Success: New Generation Capacity Building in Social Work Education Australia

Amanda Howard and Charlotte Williams

Amanda Howard, Associate Professor, the University of Sydney

Charlotte Williams, Professor, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

Address for Correspondence:

amanda.howard@sydney.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In the past decade in Australia, a considerable body of research into the academic workforce as a whole has highlighted a number of key issues for long-term workforce planning. The broader picture is of a rapidly ageing workforce, particularly in senior leadership positions, of increasing casualization of the workforce and of a shrinking pool of likely applicants ready to take up positions as they become available. These issues are reflected in the social work academic workforce raising questions about succession planning, sustainability of programs and the reproduction of the discipline. The evidence base for an examination of these issues in the social work academic workforce in Australia is weak. In this article we consider the nationally and internationally available research in order to explore the key challenges in building and sustaining a strong social work academic workforce. We conclude by advocating for a comprehensive plan for capacity building underpinned by more integrated relationships between practice and academic social work.

Keywords:

Social work leadership; workforce; research capacity building; inter-professional research

INTRODUCTION

While social work education at undergraduate and masters' (Qualifying) levels is thriving in Australia with social work programs established in 31 universities across the country (AASW, 2016), challenges, including an undersupply of qualified practitioners, an ageing workforce, and disparate or uncertain long-term career structure (Healy & Lonne, 2010) remain front and centre for the development of a strong and self-renewing workforce. These challenges are even more prominent for the social work academic workforce in Australia which, along with the academic workforce overall (Bexley, James, & Akoudis, 2011), must address issues of recruitment, capacity building and succession planning as a matter of urgency given the age profile of the current workforce.

Regarding capacity building in the academic workforce, anecdote and conjecture have ruled over hard evidence. There have been few studies in Australia focussing on the nature, experiences and status of social work academics but much commentary. Concerns expressed in the Bradley Review (2008) on the shortage of Australian academics and researchers reverberated across social work, noted by Healy and Lonne (2010) in their broad workforce review, and in the discussion papers underpinning the 2012 publication of the Australian Social Work Education Standards (ASWEAS). Additionally, Thomson (2011b) signalled the need for concerted efforts to build capacity for the future. In this respect Australia is not an outlier by comparison with other nations but, to date, there has been little systematic effort to address what are known issues confronting the discipline.

In this article we examine the key challenges in building and sustaining a strong social work academic workforce looking at current local research and learning from international work in this area. A search of relevant databases for research literature as well as reports, reviews and commentary over the past 10 years was undertaken focused on academic workforce capacity building, academic workforce development, social work education, social work academic workforce and leadership in social work education. The article provides a critical analysis of literature found both in Australia and overseas. We conclude by suggesting how we might proceed strategically and practically to develop a comprehensive plan for capacity building in social work, which forges more integrated relationships between practice and academic social work.

Academic and Social Work Workforce Capacity Building: Australian Context

During the past decade in Australia, considerable research and scholarship has been undertaken with regard to long-term workforce planning in academia overall (Hugo & Morris, 2010; Bexley et al., 2011; Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014; Turner & Brass, 2014). The combination of steadily increasing enrolments across the higher education sector (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014; Turner & Brass, 2014), a rapidly ageing workforce, particularly in senior leadership positions (Hugo & Morris, 2010; Bexley et al., 2011) and an increasing casualisation of the academic workforce (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014; Turner & Brass, 2014) along with the role played by higher education as a significant contributor to the national economy (Norton & Cherastidtham, 2014) have precipitated increased attention and anxiety regarding the health and longevity of the academic workforce. Hugo and Morris (2010) found that representation by baby boomers in

the Australian academic workforce (56%) was higher than in the workforce overall (42%) meaning that the impacts of this generation retiring in the next 5–10 years would be felt more severely and require more comprehensive succession planning to ensure longer-term sustainability in the national tertiary education sector. Further, they argue that this succession planning (which will involve the replacement of half the current workforce) will be exacerbated by the growth in student numbers and the sector as a whole requiring a larger workforce.

Support for younger people completing PhDs and entering the academic workforce in much larger numbers has been identified as a focus for current planning. There are however, a number of challenges here. Bexley et al. (2011) found that, amongst academics, the lowest satisfaction levels were to be found in early career researchers and particularly in younger people in these positions. Specific dissatisfaction was focused on employment security and income level in this study. These were identified as areas for urgent attention in academic workforce planning. In the report – *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia* (2014) – the challenges described above impacting on the academic workforce as a whole were found to be greater in relation to Humanities and Social Science (HaSS) disciplines. While student numbers were outstripping workforce growth across the university sector (36% student growth to 27% increase in workforce in 2011–2012) in HaSS disciplines, the workforce had only increased by 22%. Urgent action in relation to workforce renewal in response to imminent retirement amongst senior leadership in Australian universities is outlined in detail in this report, however, the question of available ongoing academic positions, and a suitably qualified workforce to fill even a reducing number of positions is cast into doubt by the report findings:

The evidence is that the current climate of employment for early career academics is steadily reducing the pool of likely applicants ready for the moment when the task of renewal begins. Graduates are exiting the sector. (2014, p. 89)

The picture is not all bleak, though. In recent research on academic workforce capacity building, Edwards, Bexley, and Richardson (2010) found most Higher Degree Research (HDR) students who participated viewed an academic career as desirable and the university as a preferred workplace. For this group, major barriers to their career aspirations included a perceived lack of available positions, and as with early career researchers, lower incomes than in other employment sectors. The task of ensuring that this group is able to transition to the academic workforce on completion of their studies, and that they can be retained in that workforce to support renewal over the next 5–20 years is a priority.

In relation to the social work academic workforce and workforce planning, much less research is available examining the Australian context. Healy and Lonne's (2010) research on workforce development across social work, social welfare and human services reported that, apart from psychology, all other human services graduates (including social workers) have the lowest take-up rate (less than 10%) for postgraduate study of any other sectors included in the workforce census. Similar to the academic workforce, they found the social work workforce to be rapidly ageing and currently older than the Australian workforce as a whole, with impending workforce shortages expected.

Structural Challenges

Structural challenges, including the convergence of all of the factors outlined above, create an environment where simultaneous staff shortage, reduced available positions and increasing student numbers may precipitate a crisis in academic workforce sustainability. The loss of knowledge and human capital as well as organisational memory which will accompany the retirement of over half the workforce in coming years, will be high if detailed and resourced succession planning is not in place. As the *Mapping the Humanities* report (2014), warns:

While the teaching and research outcomes generated by this workforce are impressive, and bring credit to the system, it is reasonable to predict that such a level of performance will be difficult to sustain into the future as senior staff move into retirement. ... While staffing profiles are highly variable across disciplines, they are often unbalanced ... and this impacts upon succession planning, continuity of programmes and the reproduction of disciplines, as well as upon career development and the resources for academic leadership. (2014, p. 3)

All of these factors impact directly on the social work academic workforce in addition to discipline-specific challenges. A number of factors proscribe the standing of social work in the academy in Australia. The staffing requirements within the ASWEAS (2012 V1.4 Guideline 1.4-1), often regarded as providing a positive push by the accrediting body for adequate, appropriate and quality staffing complements to deliver programs, can also be seen as a double-edged sword. The ASWEAS stipulate a minimum of five full-time (or full-time equivalent) social work qualified staff, at least three of whom should be full-time appointments, 60% of whom must be research active, with at least one at Professor or Ass/Professor level in the senior leadership role. The expected norm is that recruits to university will have a research doctorate or professional doctorate at minimum on entry, with established or emerging research records. The research requirements are also explicitly stated as more than 50% of the social work qualified staff having at least 30% of their time allocated to research activities and publishing at the minimum rate of three peer-reviewed journal articles in the preceding three years at the review of their program. Staff are also expected to demonstrate teaching quality, active involvement in field education and be up to date with “contemporary and relevant knowledge and practice experience to teach in areas relevant to their field of practice.” (AASW, 2012, v.1.4)

This credentialing is acknowledged to present challenges to recruitment for small, rural and remote programs, but also across the board, and raises issues in an increasingly competitive and austerity-conscious higher education environment. Thomson (2011b) notes the great variability and resourcing of social work courses in Australian universities and points to workforce capacity issues and professional leadership problems, in particular for institutions beyond the Group of Eight:

...it is a particular issue in regional areas where programs undergoing their cyclical program AASW review under the ASWEAS guidelines often cannot staff their programs at the senior levels of academic leadership required by the AASW. (2011b, p. 11)

One size clearly does not fit all and the AASW's provision to acknowledge staffing partnership arrangements between smaller institutions to square the circle has been seen as more of a gesture than a substantive solution. The leadership issue is particularly pertinent given the demographic profile of the Australian academic workforce, in particular the ageing workforce, and no small amount of sensitivity surrounding the international recruitment of social work professors. The issue here is not international competition but the fact that insufficient attention has been given, in-country, to strategies for career advancement and leadership training for those at mid-career level to make them more competitive in an international market. Too little is known about the constraints they face and the type of inputs they are given for career advancement.

Brew, Boud, Sang Un Namgung, Lucas, and Crawford (2015) tangentially address part of this question through their exploration of research productivity amongst English and Australian academics. The research team surveyed over 2,000 academics across a number of disciplines in six Australian and six English universities. Their interest was in the relationship between identification as a researcher and productivity – operationalised as whether academics considered themselves to be research active irrespective of whether their university defined them as such and whether they considered themselves to be an active member of a research team inside or beyond their university. Their argument posits that the academic environment both constrains and enables depending on how people interpret situations in which they find themselves and that levels of productivity were related to how academics viewed themselves and how they viewed research. What is instructive about Brew et al.'s account is the influence of disciplinary contexts and cultures, which act to construct or disable research identities in individuals. It is now well documented that social work academics face considerable barriers to such identifications (Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens, & Hussein, 2015; Teater, Lefevre, & McLaughlin, 2016) including variable access to training, support mechanisms and resources as well as grappling with high teaching loads. Research context and disciplinary orientations clearly have a bearing. Teater et al. (2016) argue:

... a key challenge is how to create a social work academic workforce which can balance expertise in both research methodology and practice concerns, and provide a facilitative academic environment which ensures its staff have time to conduct high quality research alongside preparing students for practice. (p. 3)

In recent decades, national research assessment exercises, institutional and international league tables and changing priorities in government funding of research, (*publish or perish*), have pushed forward the emphasis on quantity and good quality applied research and income generation. The higher education sector is changing rapidly: internationalising, globalising and creating new mobilities, engaging with new technologies and methodologies of learning and teaching, all of which present challenges for existing staff, for the recruitment of new staff with different skill sets and for the development of senior leaders. The expectations are growing as the resources are shrinking. At the same time, the marketization of tertiary education in Australia and the demand-led system has produced unprecedented growth in student numbers (Healy & Lonne, 2010). This rapid growth, or what Karger (2012) calls the model of a "big" social work profession responsive to the undersupply of social workers nationally, necessarily has its impacts. These parallel pressures compromise the ability of individual academics and

teams to resolve the known tensions between research vital to their career advancement and the plethora of other activities vital to the sustainability of programs.

Interestingly, Teater et al.'s (2016) analysis of the situation in the United Kingdom (UK) concludes that universities may well be unlikely to commit to the circumstances needed to ensure high-quality research activity in social work and, accordingly, call for "macro intervention" on the part of organisations such as APSW and JUC-SWEC (Australian equivalents being ACHSSW and ANZSWWER) to advocate for, and spearhead, developmental activity.

Research Capacity Building in Social Work

While research in Australia focused on capacity building with either the social work academic (or more general social work) workforce is limited, there have been some studies on research capacity building within social work practice, as well as strategies for building university-based research in social work. These studies are important to consider as attention to questions of academic workforce capacity in social work must be answered firstly, further upstream, by asking how a larger pool of researchers might be supported. Strategies for encouraging the development and practice of research knowledge, skills and practice taught in bachelors' and masters' level degrees, make up a key part of the workforce capacity-building environment. Both Beddoe (2011) and Harvey (Harvey, Plummer, Pighills, & Pain, 2013) argue that the development of a strong research culture in social work is increasingly important for both academics and practitioners in Australia and New Zealand to build credibility for the discipline and support social work interdisciplinary engagement. This echoes the earlier call by Agbim and Ozanne (2007) for social work to engage and to position itself as a legitimate and contributing discipline in a rapidly changing higher education sector.

A number of specific challenges identified by Beddoe (2011), Harvey et al. (2013) and others in developing a strong research culture and capacity in social work included lack of confidence, time and workload pressures, need for support, increased knowledge and skill development. It is here where particular attention should be focused at a local, regional and national level in developing academic social work.

Beddoe suggests that a process of building a research culture in social work from both practice and the academy simultaneously offers promise in building confidence amongst potential researchers and relationships between practice and universities, which may seed new research projects. Both this approach and Harvey and colleagues' argument for the development of a range of strategies to increase the research capacity of social work practitioners as a key component of research capacity building in social work overall, disrupt dichotomous constructions of or a split between research and practice, which have pervaded the discipline for a long time. (Drisko, 2014).

Research Learning

Taking the question of workforce capacity building in academic social work a step further back along the teaching and learning timeline, there is also a small body of research which examines the way in which research is taught to social work students.

The impact and experience of student learning about research and beginning to build confidence at this stage is an additional question for consideration in academic workforce capacity building. Some work has been done in pro-active engagement of social work students in research training and simultaneous engagement of human services agencies in developing “real world” research projects (Blakemore & Howard 2015; Pack, 2013; see also Joubert et al. in this special edition). Addressing fear and a perception of research as difficult amongst students was found in these studies to improve confidence, learning and integrating research skills and knowledge and, in many cases, students recast themselves as both end users of research and researchers. This represents an important beginning stage in a broad strategy to build a stronger research culture and self-renewing academic workforce in social work.

Dispersed or Ambivalent Research Agenda in Social Work

Ensuring good-quality, next-generation leadership is critical to sustaining the place and standing of social work within the Academy. The AASW requirements may provide a push factor to ensuring the representation of social work qualified people in leadership roles but research recognition for the discipline is fundamental to the social work academic profile. Emerging leaders are reliant on strong research environments, supportive infrastructure and positive evaluation in research assessment exercises.

Despite the limitations of such research measures, the Excellence in Research Australia ERA cycles 2012 and 2015 provide a touchstone of the standard of research being undertaken across Australia by social work academics. In 2012 for the 1607 Field of Research (FoR) code there were 16 submissions from a possible 28 institutions that offered social work (57%) of which nine were rated three or above which equates to world standard or above. One institution was rated *five* (well above world standard) and three were rated *four* (above world standard). In ERA 2015, 50% of eligible institutions submitted 1,607 (14 submissions from a possible 28) of which one university attained a *five*; four universities attained a *four*, and five achieved world standard at a *three*. Many schools of social work are ambivalent about the ratings given the internal manoeuvrings and the politics of attributing works to the various subject codes within submissions. There is also ongoing questioning of the products that are included and those excluded from ERA rankings with social work academics experiencing a *no* count on outputs that are heavily practice oriented. New measures focussing on impact in the forthcoming ERA 2018 are conducive to social work but only time will tell how well the discipline is able to engage with demonstrating this type of outcome. Notwithstanding, the published ratings and the ERA processes behind them, are the essential measures of the discipline and a key indicator of the perceived “health” of social work as an academic discipline. A dedicated strategy to *lift our game* in terms of the types and nature of products, how they are perceived, who our key collaborators should be and dovetailing outputs with university priorities for example, on impact and industry engagement, is needed to garner collective impact.

Powell and Orme (2011) identify the Research Evaluation Exercise (REF) in the UK as a contributor to further erosion of confidence amongst social workers with regard to research performance. This might, or might not, be the case in Australia as engagement with the ERA process amongst social work academics is patchy and there is no published evidence indicating their experience. What is known is that a large proportion of quality HaSS

research is taking place in metropolitan universities, especially the Go8 (Turner & Brass, 2014). What is implied is a systematic mapping of the state of play in order to determine the issues for building research capacity. Such a scope could consider the nature of outputs, quantify the extent of government funding for social work dedicated projects (ARC Discovery and Linkage and sector funding), consider how “impact” is being approached and identify training needs, mentoring and support needs and infrastructural development.

Workforce Diversity and Capacity Building

Attention to the issues of greater representation from diverse groups in the social work academic workforce and in leadership positions in Australia is sorely neglected. This is an area where research evidence is much needed, both quantitative and qualitative. Walter, Taylor and Habibis’ (2011) provocative questioning of social work practice and education, “How white is social work in Australia?”, focuses on the epistemological and pedagogical challenges posed to the lens of Whiteness theory. They stop short, however, of a rounded consideration of the issues of Indigenous and other diverse representation in staffing groups and the transformative potential such minority representation can make to social work education (Williams, 2014). These issues have troubled social work education elsewhere but remain neglected in Australian writing. Beyond initiatives to engage Indigenous peoples more fully in shaping social work education (see for example, Paul, 2013; Elston, Saunders, Bainbridge, & McCoy, 2013), the rapid growth of international students and the representation of CALD groups in the student body should give pause for thought and signal the need for a more strategic approach to enabling their transitions into leadership and other decision-making positions. Addressing diversity proactively should be part of a comprehensive strategy to build new generation leadership.

Building a Diverse Workforce

Addressing issues of workforce diversity has been highlighted by a number of researchers as a critical strategy in terms of both general and academic workforce capacity building. For example, Fletcher, Bernard, Fairtlough, and Ahmet (2015) in a UK national qualitative study of diversity in social work education report that social work educators have had a tendency to focus on recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds while often ignoring support and processes to ensure students succeed and graduate. They argue that not enough attention is paid to safety, welcome and support for minority students. Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher, and Ahmet (2014) reported on the same study focused on student perceptions of social work education and learning. They described subtle ways in which discrimination excludes some students influencing their completion of social work qualifications and engagement in postgraduate study.

What can we Learn from Work on Similar Issues Internationally?

In the UK, considerable work had been undertaken focused on building research capacity in social work (Lyons, 2000; Powell & Orme, 2011); Moriarty et al., 2015), re configuring and developing the social work workforce (Taylor, Sharland, & Whiting, 2008), and developing a discipline specific as well as interdisciplinary research culture in social work (Sharland, 2009, 2012).

The UK ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) identified social work as a priority area for research development and initiated a program of work under a strategic advisor to lift the range and quality of social work's research base (Sharland, 2009, 2013). Through the nation-wide scope, a number of key areas were identified where new research was needed, methodologies required development and infrastructural support was needed to build capacity. Sharland's work is significant in advancing debates about the nature and distinctiveness of social work knowledge which she posits as characterised by interdisciplinarity, "practice nearness," promotion of social justice, participation and empowerment, and fundamentally concerned to make a difference via knowledge transfer. In sketching out the state of play in the UK, her work pointed to strategic directions forward to achieve "a step-change" in the breadth, depth and quality of research. She argued, in reporting to the ESRC (Sharland, 2013), for a program of capacity development that required "not just infrastructure but leadership and vision" (p. 16) and places the responsibility for support firmly with the government funding body. She continues:

We need to maximise and develop disciplinary strengths along with inter-disciplinary synergies, to grow research confidence, capability and critical mass, and to nurture a culture that treasures both the inner and outer science qualities of social work and social care research. This in turn takes money... (p. 17)

Social Work and Inter-professional Research Capacity Building

Sharland (2012) describes social work in the UK as:

...in historical terms emergent, in developmental terms immature and in social and economic terms neither powerful nor well resourced. (p. 217)

She notes that this is less the case in the US, Europe or Australia, though research findings from her study about the importance of building capacity in social work research as both a professional and inter-professional activity given the multi- and even trans-disciplinary context in which social workers practise, are timely and directly relevant. There are important lessons here for Australia in relation to both university-based research learning for students, research engagement between universities and agencies, and considerations for increased recruitment and development of the social work academic workforce. Work in the US is also further advanced than in Australia, and offers similar lessons on research and workforce capacity building. For example, Dickinson and Fisher (2015) report on a comprehensive and multi-layered strategy to increase workforce capacity in child welfare via the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute implementation of a partnership approach which included all levels of organisations, student placements, on line and face-to-face support and organisational change. This research points to the links between social work academic workforce development and a multilevel strategy which includes practitioners, agencies and students.

Research, Teaching and Practice

Challenges discussed earlier in the Australian context are similar to those identified in UK research. Powell and Orme (2011) argue that the primary focus of social work undergraduate education, and subsequent workforce culture, values practice over research and establishes a binary relationship between practice and research as opposing forces in social work

knowledge. In evaluating the success of the ESRC Research Development Initiative, they also found that limited exposure to knowledge about research design and implementation has created further challenges to engagement with research amongst social workers. MacIntyre and Paul (2013) echoed this finding in their audit of social work research teaching, where ambivalence and resistance to research engagement was combined with limited skills, knowledge and confidence to create significant ongoing challenges in research capacity building for students and educators. Moriarty and colleagues (2015) found the research/teaching split an ongoing challenge for building research capacity along with increasing pressure on time from teaching responsibilities in the context of increasing student numbers and limited research infrastructure and support. They also found, however, that the majority of respondents in their study had undertaken some research activity in the past two years, were positive and even enthusiastic about further involvement in research, and were supported to some extent by their university to undertake research. One interesting note in their study was the level of academic qualification of respondents. Only 43% had completed a PhD. This is slightly lower than the finding by Tight (2012) that, overall, only 45.7% of academics working in UK universities had PhDs. In Australia, a significant increase in PhDs amongst the academic workforce from less than half in 1991 to 70% in 2013 (Norton & Cherastidham, 2014) paints a slightly different picture in terms of research focus and qualification level across the academic workforce.

HDR Recruitment and Support

Related to this is PhD recruitment and support. The age and experience profile of doctoral (including professional doctorate and PhD) students in social work in UK-based research (Moriarty et al., 2015; Scourfield & Maxwell, 2010) differs from that of other disciplines which means recruitment strategies and support (financial and other) in place are often ill suited to encouraging an increase in social work higher degree research. Scourfield and Maxwell (2010) found that social work PhD students were older (over 60% were aged 30–49 and a further 29% were aged over 50), often in senior practitioner roles, female, and over 60% were studying part-time while working full-time. Financial commitments for this cohort meant that scholarships or stipends were not attractive due to the significant pay cut for practitioners. Part-time study was chosen as the preferred option, but Scourfield and Maxwell identified challenges with completions as an area of concern in this context.

On completion of their doctoral studies, further disincentives for joining the academic workforce include the requirement to start in a junior position in a university and, in effect, move from an established career in social work to one seen as wholly new in social work academia (Moriarty et al., 2015).

Efforts to capture the extent, nature and content of social work PhD theses or initiatives aimed at discipline-specific support to doctoral students have not been a feature in the Australian context to date. The ACHSSW ran an initiative over three years, with some success, to collate the available information on social work focussed PhD theses with the aim of capturing the nature and extent of work being produced. This data, however, remained internal to the organisation and quickly fell into attrition. Efforts elsewhere which have been made to systematically support and generate new generation researchers provide useful directions for the Australian context (Scourfield & Maxwell, 2010; Sharland, 2009).

Investment in emerging researchers has been flagged by the AASW in their annual 2015 symposium. Engagement and capacity building at this level could form part of a strategic approach to career development, new leadership and disciplinary knowledge generation (Orme & Powell, 2008).

Research Culture

Finally, establishing an intentional research culture has been discussed in detail by Barner, Holosko, Thyer, and King (2015) in their study of research culture impact on academic performance. They found that psychology outperformed social work consistently due to the differences in research culture between the disciplines. In psychology, the close links between research and practice and the culture of research use by practitioners was significant in producing a higher number of research publications with a higher impact in the field. Barner and colleagues argue that the nexus between social work practice and research needs to be considerably strengthened to encourage increased productivity and impact of research on the profession. They point to historical factors shaping an antagonism between social work practice and research as a critical problem, which must be addressed in order to develop a stronger research culture in the profession.

What can be Learned Here?

A number of important lessons from work undertaken internationally in relation to social work academic workforce development and linked research capacity building.

Framing, Relationships and Positioning of Social Work Research in Universities and Practice

Positioning social work both within the university and externally as a strong, professional discipline and inter-professional contributor as Sharland (2010, 2012) recommends, plays to both the long-term strengths of the profession connecting real world research with the academy and also to social work practice history as part of multi- and trans-disciplinary teamwork in health, child protection, justice, disability and community development fields. A critical element in longer-term development of this kind of strategy is the improvement of the research–practice nexus and Barner et al.'s (2015) argument for improved research culture in social work. Building a strong academic workforce with a focus and skill set which includes within-discipline and inter-professional partnership development, strong two- or multiple-way relationships with social work practitioners and inter-professional fields of practice (Sharland, 2012) will go a considerable way in supporting the generation of high-quality, usable research and a strengthening of the value and recognition of research contributions to improved practice.

Multiple, Simultaneous and Strategic Approach Needed

Powell and Orme (2011) emphasise the importance of multi-stage and -level capacity building including structured action learning strategies, the establishment of communities of practice and a national forum for discussion of social work research. Their recommendations directly address challenges regarding confidence, knowledge and support voiced by social work educators in the UK and practitioners in Australia (Harvey et al., 2013) and New Zealand (Beddoe, 2011) through the development of multi-layer and -scale strategies for research engagement and capacity building. Connecting local action learning strategies

to a national agenda for capacity building is essential and Powell and Orme's suggestion of a research capacity building continuum is helpful in linking actions to different stages of research knowledge and confidence.

Building on this approach, Sharland proposed a multi-tiered, well-funded and strongly led strategy. Her Summary report (2010,p.iii) cautioned that:

... piecemeal support for one or two mechanisms is unlikely to pay dividends without complementary mechanisms to maximise benefits and argued that: a 3-5 year initiative with funded leadership and co-ordination, would catalyse development of capacity, infrastructure and stakeholder engagement sufficiently to provide the springboard for sustainable growth and excellence in the longer term. (Sharland, 2010,p.iii)

Development of a National Narrative and Action Plan

A critical lesson from studies in the UK with regard to social work research and workforce capacity building was the establishment of national discussions, planning and action (Powell & Orme (2011). In Australia, little research has been published which documents, maps or analyses key questions in academic workforce and research capacity building in social work. Questions remain either sparsely answered or not addressed at all including: who is undertaking a PhD in social work and what are key focus areas? What is the makeup of the current academic workforce in social work in Australia? How can we support and develop early career researchers to take up leadership roles? How can we support and integrate practitioners in research engagement, as HDR candidates and as future academics?

Sharland's (2009, 2013) work is invaluable here in outlining the process for, and shape of, a national approach to research and workforce capacity building and succession planning in academic social work in Australia. Avoiding piecemeal or inconsistent approaches, as she argues, is essential given the scale and urgency of workforce change already under way.

In this context there is an urgent need for the development of a national conversation and baseline research to establish a detailed picture of how things are in order to determine what exactly should be done at every level to build capacity. Little is currently known about the characteristics, motivations, supports and challenges within the social work academic workforce from early career researchers to professors. Healy and Lonne's (2010) study represents the first stage in a much bigger project mapping and analysing Australia's academic workforce. This is an essential next step in developing an understanding of what effective capacity building, workforce renewal and leadership planning might entail.

Dispersed and Multi-level Leadership

Powell and Orme (2011) identify dispersed leadership as a key factor for sustainability and ongoing capacity building. An important lesson here is the role played by networks, which include both academic and practice leadership. A dispersed leadership structure operating at multiple levels within academic social work and with research practitioners increases the leadership base across social work creating a more diverse and sustainable renewal process and building a networked research culture.

Taylor, Sharland, and Whiting (2008) also detailed a model for multi-level leadership and connecting roles. They focus on re-configuring the children's workforce in response to child deaths so the range of professionals working with children, young people and families, need to be able to navigate and adopt similar key roles in leading or co-ordinating responses. Social work is part of this call for multi-disciplinary approaches which also includes teachers, nurses, psychologists, teachers and others. The role of a broker in developing inter-disciplinary activity and boundary crossing is key in their argument. This kind of connecting role, which traverses disciplinary boundaries and can act as a conduit for knowledge, network and relationship development is invaluable in reshaping notions of leadership capacity building to include better co-ordination at local and national levels.

Addressing Issues of Diversity Proactively

Although in Australia, Healy and Lonne (2010) found the social work workforce did include an increasing number of workers from a range of equity groups; they note that far more work is required to provide adequate opportunity and support for diverse groups in completing social work degree programs. Representation in the social work academic workforce of diverse groups is much less understood in Australia and the lessons from Fletcher et al. (2015) are valuable in progressing further research and policy action in this area. Proactive strategies and intentional support systems to recruit, retain and promote greater diversity in social work academia are critical for both overall succession planning and for the development of a workforce, research agenda and research culture reflective of Australian society.

What Can and Should We Do?

The foregoing discussion represents a broad sweep of a number of issues attendant on what is often called succession planning, the core elements of which raise questions about the sustainability of the discipline both in relation to research capacity, career progression and leadership. More work needs to be done on scoping and prioritising the key issues raised in the Australian context and developing an evidence base to underpin a capacity building strategy. A consideration of key constraints and enablers is implied. A phased approach might include a more in-depth consideration of the available literature at home and away, deep consultation with key stakeholders, a review of tried and tested strategies for change in order to develop a multi-tier, multi-level development strategy. The moment is opportune. A powerful argument for investment exists triggered not least by the available evidence that emerges from the *Mapping HASS* report. Such an investment in a national agenda for capacity building could be considered by a partnership of key organisations such as ACHSSW, ANZSSWER and the AASW. The potential benefits attendant on research growth, career and leadership development are immense – a default to the status quo potentially costly.

References

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2016). Accredited courses. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/careers-study/accredited-courses>
- Agbim, K., & Ozanne, E. (2007). Social work educators in a changing higher education context: Looking back and looking forward 1982–2005. *Australian Social Work*, 60(1), 68–82.
- AASW. (2012). *Australian social work education standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3550>

- Barner, J. R., Holosko, M. J., Thyer, B. A., & King Jr, S. (2015). Research productivity in top-ranked schools in psychology and social work: Does having a research culture matter? *Journal of Social Work Education, 51*, 5–18. doi:10.1080/10437797.2015.977123
- Beddoe, L. (2011). Investing in the future: Social workers talk about research. *British Journal of Social Work, 41*, 557–575. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcq138
- Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., Fletcher, J., & Ahmet, A. (2014). A qualitative study of marginalised social work students' views of social work education and learning. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 1934–1949. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct055
- Bexley, E., James, R., & Akoudis, S. (2011). *The Australian academic profession in transition. Addressing the challenge of reconceptualising academic work and regenerating the academic workforce*. Commissioned report prepared for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1490923/The_Academic_Profession_in_Transition_Sept2011.pdf
- Blakemore, T., & Howard, A. (2015). Engaging undergraduate social work students in research through experience based learning. *Social Work Education, 34*(7), 861–880. doi:10.1080/02615479.2015.1065809
- Bradley Review. (2008, December). *Review of Australian higher education final report*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Retrieved from <http://Deewr.gov.au>
- Brew, A., Boud, D., Sang Un Namgung, Lucas, L., & Crawford, K. (2015). Research productivity and academic's conceptions of research. *Higher Education, 71*(5), 681–697. doi:10.1007/s10734-015-9930-6
- Dickinson, N. S., & Fisher, C. E. (2015). Leading change: Partnerships to improve the child welfare workforce. *Policy and Practice, 73*(1), 16–19.
- Drisko, J. (2014). Split or synthesis: The odd relationship between clinical practice and research in social work and in social work education. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 42*, 182–192. doi:10.1007/s10615-014-0493-2
- Edwards, D., Bexley, E., & Richardson, S. (2010). *Regenerating Australia's academic workforce*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Elston, J. K., Saunders, V., Hayes, B., Bainbridge, R., & McCoy, B. (2013). Building Indigenous Australian research capacity. *Contemporary Nurse, 46*(1), 6–12.
- Fletcher J., Bernard, C., Fairtlough, A., & Ahmet, A. (2015). Beyond equal access to equal outcomes: The role of the institutional culture in promoting full participation, positive inter-group interaction and timely progression for minority social work students. *British Journal of Social Work, 45*, 120–137. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct081
- Harvey, D., Plummer, D., Pighills, A., & Pain, T. (2013) Practitioner research capacity: A survey of social workers in Northern Queensland. *Australian Social Work, 66*(4), 540–554. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2012.754916>
- Healy, K., & Lonnie, B. (2010). *The social work and human services workforce: Report from a national study of education, training and workforce needs*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Hugo, G., & Morris, A. (2010). *Investigating the ageing academic workforce: Stocktake*. Adelaide, SA: National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems, University of Adelaide.
- Karger, H. (2012). Lessons from American social work education: Caution ahead. *Australian Social Work, 65*(3), 311–325.
- Lyons, K. (2000). The place of research in social work education. *British Journal of Social Work, 30*(4), 433–447.
- MacIntyre, G., & Paul, S. (2013). Teaching research in social work: Capacity and challenge. *British Journal of Social Work, 43*, 685–702. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcs010
- Moriarty, J., Manthorpe, J., Stevens, M., & Hussein, S. (2015). Educators or researchers? Barriers and facilitators to undertaking research among UK social work academics. *British Journal of Social Work, 45*, 1659–1677. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcu077
- Norton, A., & Cherastidham, I. (2014). *Mapping Australian higher education, 2014-15*. Carlton, VIC: Grattan Institute.
- Orme, J., & Powell, J. (2008). Building research capacity in social work: Process and issues. *British Journal of Social Work, 38*(5), 988–1008.
- Powell, J., & Orme, J. (2011). Increasing the confidence and competence of social work researchers: What works? *British Journal of Social Work, 41*, 1566–1585. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr027
- Pack, M. J. (2013). A tale of two programmes: Developing communities of learning with practice partners in social work and humanitarian studies at Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory, Australia. *Social Work Education, 32*(8), 1011–1020. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2012.745846>

- Paul, D. (2013). Creating change: building the capacity of the medical workforce in Aboriginal health. *ANZ Journal of Surgery*, 83, 55–59.
- Scourfield, J., & Maxwell, N. (2010). Social work doctoral students in the UK: A webbased survey and search of the Index to Theses. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(2), 548–566.
- Sharland, E. (2010). *Strategic adviser for social work and social care research main report to the Economic and Social Research Council Training and Development Board*. Swindon, UK: Economic and Social Research Council. Full and Summary Report: <http://www.researchcatalogue.esrc.ac.uk/grants/RES-068-31-0001/read>
- Sharland, E. (2012). All together now? Building disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research capacity in social work and social care. *British Journal of Social Work*, 42, 208–226. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcr061
- Sharland, E. (2013). Where are we now? Strengths and limitations of UK social work and social care research. *Social Work and Social Science Review*, 16(2), 7–19. doi: 10.1921/3003.16206
- Teater, B., Lefevre, M., & McLaughlin, H. (2016). Research activity among UK social work academics. *Journal of Social Work*. doi:10.1177/1468017316652002
- Taylor, I., Sharland, E., & Whiting, S. (2008). Building capacity for the children's workforce: findings from the knowledge review of the higher education response. *Learning in Health and Social Care*, 7(4), 184–197.
- Tight, M. (2012). *Academic staff in UK higher education institutions: Are they fit for purpose?* Lancaster, UK: Lancaster University, Department of Educational Research.
- Thomson J. (2011a). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards (ASWEAS) review. Literature review* (June 2011). Retrieved from <http://www.aasw.asn.au/sitebuilder/whatwedo/knowledge/asset/files/47/asweasliteraturereview.pdf>
- Thomson J. (2011b). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards (ASWEAS) review. Discussion paper* (July 2011). Retrieved from www.aasw.asn.auon request.
- Turner, G., & Brass, K. (2014). *Mapping the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia*. Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra. Retrieved from <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:353680/UQ353680.pdf>
- Walter, M., Taylor, S., & Habibis, D. (2011). How white is social work in Australia? *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 6–19.
- Williams, C. (2014). *The catalysers: "black" professionals and the anti-racist movement*. In M. Lavalette & L. Penketh (Eds.), *Race, racism and social work: Contemporary debates and issues* (pp. 53–70). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Strengthening the Knowledge Base: A Research Framework for Social Work Education

Marie Connolly, Charlotte Williams and Lesley Cooper

Marie Connolly, Professor, The University of Melbourne
Charlotte Williams, Professor, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
Lesley Cooper, Professor, The University of Wollongong

Address for Correspondence:

marie.connolly@unimelb.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In the context of the current emphasis upon evidence-informed practices, the future evolution of social work education, including its accreditation and practice standards, relies on the use of rigorous evidence from studies of the efficacy of various teaching and learning practices. Yet research into social work education tends to occur in an ad hoc way with little strategic attention to identifying specific information needs and how they might build to form a picture over time. The creation of research strategies that address integrated evidence needs can help to structure potential research responses ensuring that the best possible advantage is gained from current and future research. This paper discusses the development of a research framework for Australian social work education that captures key research domains across service user, academic workforce and institutional systems settings.

Keywords: *evidence-informed practice; research strategies; Social work research*

INTRODUCTION

Although notions of evidence-informed practice are now pervasive in social work, the Australian social work education standards relating to the ways in which social work content will or should be taught are generally developed within a research vacuum. Rather than being informed by research from social work or education, the standards are invariably influenced by traditional preferences, for example, practice conventions that argue for individual supervision rather than group or peer supervision for students on placement. The standards are also influenced by assumptions that one way of teaching is inherently better than another, for example, face-to-face teaching rather than online delivery and they are often influenced by benchmarking against social work education internationally which is, of course, important for international transferability of qualifications, but can also inhibit innovation.

Accordingly a number of perennial questions haunt social work education and particularly in relation to the evidence base for Field Education. Why a 1,000 hours of assessed practice? What constitutes a good placement? What are the most appropriate models of Field Education for practice competence? Why 20 days of face-to-face teaching rather than 16 or 25, or more? Many of these questions are raised by stakeholders including academic staff, employers, and graduates and summarized by the accrediting body themselves in their ambition to state, and restate, the standards for social work education (see AASW 2016).

That research does not necessarily underpin standards and influence the shape of social work education more generally does not necessarily reflect a lack of interest in research. Nor does it reflect views about the value of knowledge-informed practice in Australian social work education. Rather, it reflects a lack of volume of social work research upon which decisions could be made.

The lack of a strategic approach to the development of research-informed practice is not unusual (Connolly, 2004; Williams, 2016). In many fields of practice, practitioners, managers of frontline services and policy makers legitimately use their practice knowledge and wisdom as guidelines which are often grounded in principled approaches, experiential knowledge and interpretative frameworks. With respect to empirical research, however, they have to make do when research findings are either limited or are unavailable to them within pressured timeframes. Decisions need to be made quickly and the absence of helpful-outcome research is a common reality. When reviews of practice take place, they invariably lament a lack of empirical research and make recommendations that research efforts increase across multiple domains. Recently, reform efforts have signaled the need for field of practice research strategies (DHHS, 2016). Recommendations relating to the training and education of social workers are often found in these fields of practice reviews (see for example, the recent Child Protection Systems Royal Commission, 2016). When this happens, providers of social work education tend to become reactive: looking at ways in which review findings might be integrated into the curriculum, or exploring ways in which training and education might better respond to the issues exposed by the review. There is rarely relevant research to hand that would support or challenge review recommendations leaving the discipline on the back foot in determining the future of social work education.

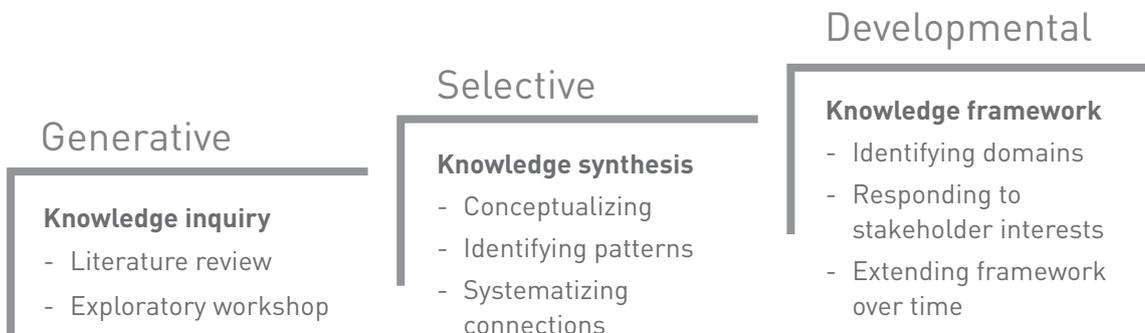
We argue that a more strategic, less reactive way of anticipating the demands of contemporary practice and strengthening the knowledge base is to build a research framework for social work education that captures the broad-ranging policy and practice concerns, effectively harnesses the research that has been done, and creates the opportunity to positively inform the development of social work education through research-based knowledge. Such an approach takes us beyond convention towards innovation and the building of novel research trajectories to drive change.

This paper discusses the development of a strategic research framework for Australian social work education, exploring its methodological approach, and some of the implications for the future development of research-informed social work education. It is anticipated that this planned approach could provide a blueprint for professional bodies, governments and interested parties such as the Heads of Schools of Social Work, to help shape and influence future research.

BUILDING THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The development of the framework was informed by two key areas of inquiry: a selective scan of research undertaken in the area of social work education, and insights from a national meeting of leaders in social work education where the question of social work education research priorities was explored and debated. This formed the generative stage of the development of the framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Process of research framework development (adapted from Connolly et al 2016)



An analysis of recent literature and research over two years (2015 and 2016) from three journals was undertaken: the *Journal of Social Work Education*; *Social Work Education: The International Journal*; and *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*. This analysis involved a review of all the abstracts of articles appearing in the 2015/2016 editions. Although limited, the review of the abstracts generated a myriad of issues relating to: *students and stakeholders* (e.g., learning needs, ethics, cultural competence, disciplinary identity, readiness for practice); *academic workforce and practice* (for example: social work faculty development; modes of delivery in social work education; pedagogy); and *institutional systems* (e.g., evidence-based education, the evaluation of programs; knowledge systems, sustainability). Many of these issues were also identified at the national ACHSSW (Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work) meeting of social work educators in 2015 and, in particular, the need for: a more flexible and sustainable curriculum; a cohesive framework for practice readiness in social work; building an outcome-focused curriculum; service user needs across multiple domains;

service-user-informed curricula; better understanding graduate destinations and disciplinary identity; insights from interdisciplinary practice; and understanding and advancing the place of social work in the academy, including the impact of increased casualization of the academic workforce.

The second stage involved a knowledge synthesis whereby the data related to the issues generated in stage 1 from the literature analysis and workshop were conceptualized into manageable categories through the selective identification of themes. The last stage of the process was developmental – where the categories were reconceptualized into framework domains across stakeholder interests (see Figure 2).

This threefold process provided rich information relating to the current demands and expectations of social work education, stakeholder needs and issues, and the context in which social work education is delivered.

THE FRAMEWORK'S DOMAINS

From the knowledge synthesis, three broad framework domains were identified: *Democratizing access and experience*; *Pedagogy, methods and practice of teaching*; and *Social work education experiences and outcomes*. These domains were then explored across three stakeholder interest groups identified in the generative phase of the process: students and stakeholders; academic workforce and practice; institutional systems (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Research Framework for Australian Social Work Education

RESEARCH STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION	STUDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS	ACADEMIC WORKFORCE AND PRACTICE	INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS
Democratizing Access and Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATSI engagement in and experience of swe • Specific population issues: cald; lgbi; disability; rural and remote communities • Low ses students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing in the academy • The sw academic workforce • Casualization of the academic workforce • Adjunct workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics and pathways: cross-national comparisons • Program sustainability • Life-long learning
Pedagogy: methods and practice of teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional identity • Experience of teaching and learning • Cultural proficiency • Intersectionality • Social justice and human rights • Service users and carers in the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modes of delivery • Use of technology • Interdisciplinary and interprofessional practice • Practice teaching and learning • Skills training • Problem-based learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based education • Utilization of administrative data • Practice learning demographics • Program evaluations and pedagogical improvement
Social work education experience & outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness for practice • Suitability for professional practice • Fields of practice • Post-qualifying jobs, salaries and skills • Doctoral experiences and outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically reflective practitioners • Integration of theory and practice • Academic and field partnerships and experience • Research translation & knowledge exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to sustainable societies • Cultural responsiveness • Scholarship of teaching and learning • Internationalising the curriculum • Growth and demand for social work education

Each of the domains, with their corresponding research areas, will now be explored more fully.

Democratizing Access and Experience

Engaging, retaining and supporting students and staff in social work education is important to the longer-term sustainability of social work programs. The Commonwealth has funded the Higher Education Participation, Partnerships Programs (HEPPP) to ensure that Australians from low-SES backgrounds who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to do so. The goal is to improve student access, retention and completion. Some social work programs have benefitted from this funding program implementing transition programs for low-SES students from TAFE, Aboriginal communities and from regional areas.

Universities across Australia apply efforts to provide for the learning needs of students, particularly the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students, a clear imperative in Australian social work education (Zubrzycki et al., 2014). Understanding the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse populations (CALD), LGBTI peoples, and people with specific needs and interests such as those with disabilities, and those from rural and remote communities is also important as programs focus on equity and responsiveness to diversity and diversity of need. In addition to exploring the experiences of diverse student populations, the framework also recognizes the need for systems to better utilize administrative data to compare demographics and student pathways through institutional systems over time. This would enable a better understanding of access to social work training nationally, and would also prepare for future cross-national studies. Routinely collected information through audits of the baseline demographics and population characteristics of student and educator populations could well be part of annual reporting by programs to the AASW and the monitoring and review of this data more efficiently evaluated to calibrate issues of growth and demand and the implications for quality and sustainability of social work education. As Karger (2012, p. 323) points out, “this kind of study could look at guidelines around what constitutes an adequate supply of social workers, and provide benchmarks on the optimal geographical density of social work programs.” Data on recruitment, retention and progression of underrepresented groups are critical to promoting access and equity in social work education. Currently the AASW does not collate or publicly release data on social work education (Karger, 2012).

Democratizing access and experience also has a staffing dimension adding to the sustainability of social work within the academy, the field, and the discipline more broadly. It is clear that Australian social work education faces many challenges with the casualization of the workforce, creating significant inequities, an issue that is also apparent internationally (de Sax Zerden et al., 2015; Wilson & Campbell, 2013). The report *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Australia* (Turner & Brass, 2014, 2015) identifies key issues significant to the social work academic workforce, including the ageing of that workforce leading to an impending shortage of senior staff available to take on leadership roles, shrinking opportunities for new entrants to the profession and limited career paths for junior academics. All of these issues impact on succession planning, the continuity of programs and reproduction of the

discipline. Concerns are also raised about the representation of particular groups within the academic workforce, and in particular those from Indigenous backgrounds (Zubrzycki et al., 2016).

The framework recognizes the potential for research to contribute toward a stronger context for advocacy in these areas creating better understanding of the ways in which people advance within the academy. The roles and development of the academic adjunct workforce – liaison staff and fieldwork educators – is also critical to this reinforcing the importance and significance of life-long learning and professional development and access to life-long learning (Halton, Powell, & Scanlon, 2015; Webster, 2015).

Pedagogy: Methods and Practice of Teaching

Pedagogy clearly sits at the heart of social work education, both with respect to classroom teaching and practice learning. The importance of building a critically reflective, integrated disciplinary identity (Marlowe, Appleton, Chinnery, & Van Stratum, 2015; Pullen Sansfacon & Crete, 2016), aligned with social work values such as social justice, intersectionality and the support of human rights, is necessary preparation for the realities of practice within diverse practice settings (Betts, Maidment, & Evan, 2016; Bubar, Cespedes, & Bundy-Fazioli, 2016). Indeed Betts and colleagues argue that “action is required at all levels of learning to create substantial change in this area of social work education. This action can include challenging existing student and faculty perceptions and prejudices, incorporating relevant, appropriate, and critical course content, and to foster critical curiosity and engagement in students” (p. 99). Research to better understand these issues across programs needs to move beyond current student evaluation processes that universities typically rely upon to assess teaching efficacy. It is important to understand, for example, how cultural competence is taught, learned and ultimately evaluated (Jani, Osteen, & Shipe, 2016) and how programs engage with the requirements on the Indigenous curriculum. Indigenous epistemological and methodological challenges to the curriculum and pedagogic development are implied by the *Getting it Right* initiative but will need to be consolidated through rigorous research (Zubrzycki et al., 2016). Research into the ways in which student assessment can build upon a coherent and integrated knowledge base also has the potential to strengthen pedagogical practices (Hodgson & Watts, 2016). This relies on creating culturally safe learning environments and using reflective practice to build “culturally responsive pedagogy” (Tsuruda & Shepherd, 2016, p. 29).

Research into teaching and learning has clear implications for academic and fieldwork practice. Universities collect a huge amount of data relating to, for example, fieldwork practice. It is important that insights are drawn from this wealth of information to build the knowledge base and better inform program development. The literature review underpinning the ASWEAS 2012 consultation (Thomson, 2011) identified a number of issues associated with the lack of evidence to underpin Field Education standards, including supervision models, skills development and assessment strategies. Increasingly developments in technology provide important opportunities to increase access to social work education through online program delivery. These advances also push forward pedagogical innovation. While fully online programs are offered extensively in the US (see Moore et al., 2015), Australia continues to debate whether it is possible to provide online courses that fully meet the learning needs

of students. One of the consequences of focusing on the technology, is that we overlook the fundamentals of teaching practice – that is the relationship between the learner and the teacher and how this can be facilitated using online technology. There is no question that rural and remote communities in Australia present unique challenges to the delivery of social work education (Jones-Mutton, Short, Bidgood, & Jones, 2015). Crisp and Hosken (2016, p. 506) argue for a “fundamental rethink of practice learning in social work education” that creatively responds to the needs of rural and remote communities in ways that do not compromise quality learning. The challenges facing international students in practice learning and the value of student mobility and international learning to the portability of qualifications are all areas for focused research. Developing alternatives to the traditional apprenticeship model of field education (Hosken et al., 2016; Vassos & Connolly, 2014) also has potential, and studies that explore new and different ways of delivering quality social work education need to be encouraged. This would involve collaborations between researchers and the professional body to enable flexibility in meeting current standards throughout the research process.

Creating co-design curriculum and action research opportunities also provides potential for pedagogical innovation worthy of investment (Driessens, McLaughlin, & van Doorn, 2016). For example, involving service users in curriculum development is not new (Irvine, Molyneuz, & Gillman, 2015), but is relatively underdeveloped in the Australian context, despite some notable exceptions (Martin, 2016). Interdisciplinary research has also been identified as largely fragmented within Australian universities, undermining its potential contribution to cross-disciplinary learning (Stewart, Betts, Chee, & Ingamells, 2015).

Finally, the role that programs have in driving and developing pedagogical change in social work education creates important research opportunities, particularly through the development of Evidence-Based Education. According to Pollio (2015, p. 619), “EBE is the process of teaching students to understand, evaluate, and incorporate evidence into their practice.” Pollio goes on to suggest that, whilst practitioners do use EBP, “many (or even most) practitioners continue to use unsupported or ineffective practices” (p. 620). Reinforcing these ideas internationally there have also been calls for a greater evidence-based approach to the development of accreditation standards (; Yaffe, 2013). Again this will involve moving beyond student evaluations of teaching and adopting a stronger emphasis on program evaluation (Higgins, 2015). This includes understanding the roles and responsibilities of academic and field staff, their views and perceptions of satisfaction with the all aspects of the program, including field placements; the experiences of students on placement, and the ways in which social work education is influencing the future generation of social workers (Hay, Dale, & Heung, 2016).

Social Work Education Experience and Outcomes

The concept of *student experience* has been elevated on the agenda of higher education providers in an increasingly marketised and competitive environment. Higher Education Institutes (HEI) vie to provide *added value* in terms of student employability and graduate attributes. Qualitative experience data, outcomes and destinations data are critical to understanding how social work students fare in the contemporary university. Work, for example, has recently been conducted for the AASW on student poverty and the ways in

which this represents a major constraint on their learning (AASW, 2016). There is a need to chart the development of student learning across their degree scheme and the specific outcomes for particular groups in terms of destinations in the workforce. A considerable field of research has opened up in relation to understanding demographics and pathways of student groups, including international students and Indigenous students.

This last domain of the framework focuses upon the transition from classroom to social work practice, and the broader development of the discipline through the fostering of critically reflective practitioners, the integration of theory and practice, and the broader movement supporting the scholarship of teaching and learning (Grise-Owens, Owens, & Miller, 2016). Drawing upon the work of Shulman (2004), Grise-Owens and colleagues identify this movement as “promoting teaching as community property, that is, happening in a larger context of critical enquiry” (p. 7). This points to the broader aims and vision of social work education, and its potential to impact on issues beyond the classroom, and indeed, the teaching environment. This includes institutional responsiveness to cultural issues, and advancing new and important areas of scholarship, for example, environmental social work and ecological justice (Melekis & Woodhouse, 2015).

Beginning with the transition from the classroom to practice, whilst research attention has been focused on student readiness for practice nationally and internationally (e.g., Staempfli, Adshead, & Fletcher 2015; Howard, Johnston, & Agllias, 2015), there is still a good deal to know particularly given Pollio’s comments relating to the lack of outcome-focused practice in the field. The integration of theory to practice, and the way in which social work education prepares students for specific fields of practice continues to generate research, for example in mental health (Martin, 2016), ageing (Park, 2015), and other specialist areas such as working the context of sexual violence (Thorburn, 2015). This kind of research is important in all areas of practice, including child welfare and family violence. Whilst there has been a longstanding emphasis on using research to inform practice, the way in which research is translated and disseminated to practice systems is often not presented in practitioner-friendly ways (Connolly, Healey, & Humphreys, 2016). More work on knowledge translation is required to address what would appear to be a poor take-up of research utilization in both student and practitioner fields practice.

Given the complexity of contemporary practice, it is also clear that new graduates face many challenging issues when they enter the workforce, particularly in their first year (Hunt, Lowe, Smith, Kuruvila, & Webber-Dreadon, 2016). Frequently asked questions are: How well equipped are graduates in terms of the transferability of skills across fields of practice and their aptitude for policy analysis? How flexible and adaptable are they to rapidly changing practice environments? Within the Australian context, recent research into the job satisfaction and workforce retention of new graduates draws attention to the invisibility of newly qualified workers in community services, and particularly the need to better understand the needs of workers in rural and regional areas (Healy, Harrison, & Foster, 2015). Understanding the experiences of new graduates, and their early career patterns (Choi, Urbanski, Fortune, & Rogers 2015), requires both qualitative and quantitative research. What happens to new graduates early in their careers is largely uncharted territory in Australia yet it is essential to better understand post-qualifying

work experiences, including skill readiness for practice, as well as patterns of remuneration, retention and, conversely, the loss of people from the discipline.

The discussion so far has generally been focused on entry to practice social work education. PhD programs nevertheless provide the primary feeder into the academic workforce, and it is important that research facilitates both the development and improvement of this area of teaching and learning (Petr et al., 2015). While a PhD, or a near completed PhD, is required to secure an academic post in most universities in Australia, its value to the field is an important area of research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The value of developing a research framework within a national context should not be underestimated. Such frameworks can provide the basis for the development of an integrated knowledge base, provide the spur for marshaling effort around a coherent agenda and avoid waste, attrition and duplication. It allows the profession to garner and consolidate its developing knowledge base and to push innovation in the field. In addition, such strategies open up possibilities for new forms of collaboration and highlight the efficiencies of cross-institutional working in an era of resource constraint. In a relatively small research community, the need for a strategy to avoid duplication of effort and attrition of effort is compelling. The recent emergence of the National Field Education Network is encouraging in this respect. There is an urgent need to share data sets and resources and to collaborate and cooperate in the collection of baseline data to which this network can contribute. Alliances between the AASW and ACHSSW could also be productive towards this end.

This notwithstanding, there are important reasons to highlight a strategic approach to the development of a body of knowledge in social work education in terms of the standing of social work in the academy. An evident contemporary trend has been the loss of dedicated social work schools and the subsuming of social work knowledges and pedagogical practices in the push towards inter-disciplinarity. In many ways social work research is losing ground to other disciplines and looking to other disciplines for its evidence base. Social work education has strong contributions to make to the inter-disciplinary mix and strong contributions to make to broader communities of practice. International collaborations alongside many of the indicators outlined in this framework will bring new insights to bear on social work education in Australia and, at the same time, proffer innovations forged in-country to international attention.

The importance of developing a portrait of social work education in Australia for both national development and international benchmarking provides a mandate for social work leadership. These matters should not be subject to “ad hocery” or whim, they should not be reliant on employer expectations alone or the push of crises in practice and the vagaries of what is/is not in fashion. They deserve to be crafted by design and deliberation over key priorities amongst stakeholders if there is to be a strong evidence base to underpin requisite standards and to push forward innovation. The positive growth in research outputs in social work research across institutions in Australia needs to be harnessed to make necessary changes to social work education policy and practice and bolster the sorely needed evidence base.

This paper has outlined an approach to the development of a research agenda as a first step. User and other stakeholder involvement in scoping the prioritizing of such a research agenda would usefully enhance this development.

References

- AASW (Australian Association of Social Work). (2016). *Discussion Paper: Informing the 2016 ASWEAS Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8696>
- AASW. (2016). *National Study of Social Work Students 2015–2016: Briefing Paper – important emerging findings*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/national-study-of-social-work-students>
- Betts, D., Maidment, J., & Evans, N. (2016). Double jeopardy: The ageing LGBT population in social work education. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18(1), 88–102.
- Bubar, R., Cespedes, K., & Bundy-Fazioli, K. (2016). Intersectionality and social work: Omissions of race, class, and sexuality in graduate school education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 52(3), 283–296.
- Child Protection Systems Royal Commission. (2016). *The life they deserve: Child Protection Systems Royal Commission Report*. Adelaide, SA: Government of South Australia.
- Choi, M.J., Urbanski, P., Fortune, A.E. & Rogers, C. (2015). Early career patterns for social work graduates. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51 (3) 475-493.
- Connolly, M. (2004). Building research strategies in child welfare: A research and evaluation framework for policy and practice. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, 22, 119–127.
- Connolly, M., Healey, L., & Humphreys, C. (2016). The collaborative practice framework for child protection and specialist domestic and family violence services – the PATRICIA Project: Key findings and future directions. *Compass: Research to policy and practice*. Alexandria NSW: ANROWS.
- Crisp, B.R. & Hosken, N. (2016). A fundamental rethink of practice learning in social work education. *Social Work Education*, 35, (5), 506-517.
- de Saxe Zerden, L., Ilinitch, T. L., Carlston, R. Knutson, D., Blesdoe, B. E., & Howard, M. O. (2015). Social work faculty development: An exploratory study of non-tenure-track women faculty. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51, 738–753. doi:10.1080/10437797.2015.1076284.
- DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services). (2016). *Roadmap for reform: Strong families, safe children. The first steps*. Melbourne, VIC, Department of Health and Human Services.
- Driessens, K., McLaughlin, H., & van Doorn, L. (2016). The meaningful involvement of service users in social work education: Examples from Belgium and The Netherlands. *Social Work Education*, 35(7), 739–751.
- Grise-Owens, E., Owens, L. W. & Miller, J. J. (2016). Conceptualizing the scholarship of teaching and learning for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 52(1,) 6–17.
- Halton, C., Powell, F., & Scanlon, M. (2015). *Continuing professional development in social work*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Hay, K., Dale, M., & Yeung, P. (2016). Influencing the future generation of social workers: Field educator perspectives on social work field education. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18(18), 39–54.
- Healy, K., Harrison, G., & Foster, M. (2015). Job satisfaction and workforce retention of newly qualified social work and community services workers: An Australian pilot study. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(1), 8–24.
- Higgins, M. (2015). Evaluations of social work education: A critical review. *Social Work Education*, 34(7), 771–784.
- Hodgson, D., & Watts, L. (2016). Four principles of good assessment practice: A teaching and learning approach to designing and assessing student work. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18 (1), 8-22.
- Hosken, N., Green, L., Laughton, J., Van Ingen, R., Walker, F., Goldingay S., & Vassos, S. (2016). A rotational social work field placement model in regional health. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18(1), 72–87.
- Howard, A., Johnston, L., & Agllias, K. (2015). Ready or not: Workplace perspectives on work-readiness indicators in social work graduates. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(2), 7–22.
- Hunt, S., Lowe, S., Smith, K., Kuruvila, A., & Webber-Dreadon, E. (2016). Transition to professional social work practice: The initial year. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18(1) 55–71.

- Irvine, J., Molyneuz, J., & Gillman, M. (2015). "Providing a link with the real world": Learning from the student experience of service user and carer involvement in social work education. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 34(2), 138–150.
- Jani, J.S., Osteen, P., & Shipe, S. (2016). Cultural competence and social work education: Moving toward assessment of practice behaviours. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 52(3) 311–324.
- Jones-Mutton, T., Short, M., Bidgood, T., & Jones, T. (2015). Field education: Off-site social work supervision in rural, regional and remote Australia. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(1), 83–97.
- Karger, H. (2012). Lessons from American social work education: Caution ahead. *Australian Social Work*, 65(3), 311–325.
- Marlowe, J. M., Appleton, C., Chinnery, S., & Van Stratum, S. (2015). The integration of personal and professional selves: Developing students' critical awareness in social work practice. *Social Work Education*, 34(1), 60–73.
- Martin, J. (2016). Mental health literacy and social work education. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18(1), 103–120.
- Melekis, K., & Woodhouse, V. (2015). Transforming social work curricula: Institutional supports for promoting sustainability. *Social Work Education*, 34(5), 573–585.
- Moore, S. E., Golder, S., Sterrett, E., Faul, A. C., Yankeelow, P., Weathers Mathis, L., & Barbee, A. P. (2015). Social work online education: A model for getting started and staying connected. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51, 505–518.
- Park, H-J. (2015). Infusing gerontological content into social work education in New Zealand and Korea. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(1) 25–38.
- Petr, C. G., Harrington, D., Kim, K., Black, B., Cunningham-Williams, R. M., & Bentley, K. J. (2015). Quality indicators and expected outcomes for social work PhD programs: Perceptions of social work students, faculty, and administrators. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51, 648–667.
- Pollio, D.E. (2015). Guest Editorial – Evidence-based education: From paradigm shift to social movement – and back again?. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51 (4), 619-623.
- Pullen Sansfacon, A., & Crete, J. (2016). Identity development among social workers, from training to practice: Results from a three-year qualitative longitudinal study. *Social Work Education*, 35(7), 767–779.
- Shulman, L. S. (2004). *Teaching as community property: Essays on higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Staempfli, A., Adshead, L., & Fletcher, J. (2015). Ready for qualified practice? A comparative study of capability for critical reflection and analysis of MA Social work and MA Step Up to social work students at the end of second placement. *Social Work Education*, 34, (8), 952-966.
- Stewart, V., Betts, H., Chee, P., & Ingamells, A. (2015). Interprofessional learning: Health and allied health students in a community context. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(2), 70–85.
- Thomson, J. (2011). Australian social work education and accreditation standards (ASWEAS) review: Literature review. Retrieved from <http://www.aasw.asn.au/sitebuilder/whatwedo/knowledge/asset/files/47/asweasliteraturereview.pdf>
- Thorburn, N. (2015). Training needs of sexual violence crisis workers. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17(1), 112–125.
- Tsuruda, S. & Shepherd, M., (2016). Reflective practice: Building a culturally responsive pedagogical framework to facilitate safe bicultural learning. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 18 (1), 23-38.
- Turner, G., & Brass, K. (2014). *Mapping the humanities, arts and social sciences in Australia*. Retrieved from http://www.humanities.org.au/Portals/0/documents/Policy/Research/MappingProject/txt/Mapping_HASS_Aust_FinalReport_All_Oct2014.pdf
- Turner, G., & Brass, K. (2015). *Mapping the humanities one year on*. Retrieved from http://www.humanities.org.au/Portals/0/documents/Policy/Research/MappingProject/txt/Mapping_HASS_DASSH_2015.pdf
- Vassos, S., & Connolly, M. (2014). Team-based rotation in social work field education: An alternative way of preparing students for practice in statutory child welfare services. *Communities, Children and Families Australia*, 8(1,) 49–66.
- Webster, M. (2015). Online continuing professional development: Key factors for successful engagement. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 17 (1), 68-82.
- Williams, J. H. (2016). Where is the evidence: Can we develop stronger research and scientific approaches to understand complex systems and interactions? [Editorial]. *Social Work Research*, 40(3), 131–133.

Wilson, G., & Campbell, A. (2013). Developing social work education: Academic perspectives. *British Journal of Social Work*, 43(5), 1005–1023.

Wyatt, Z., & Oliver, L. (2016). Y-Change: Young people as experts and collaborators. *Advances in Social work & Welfare Education*, 18(1), 121–126.

Yaffe, J. (2013). Where's the evidence in social work education? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49, 525–527.

Zubrzycki, J., Green, S., Jones, V., Stratton, K., Young, S., & Bessarab, D. (2014). Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching: Sydney. Retrieved from https://www.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/655804/Getting_It_Right_June_2014.pdf

Teaching Research in Social Work Through Academic Practitioner Partnerships: Knowledge, Competency and Confidence

Lynette Joubert, Lisa Hebel, Annaliese McNeill, Sarah Firth, Erin McFadden and Alison Hocking

Lynette Joubert, Professor, University of Melbourne

Lisa Hebel, Senior Social Work Advisor, Social Work Clinical Educator, Research Coordinator, NorthWestern Mental Health

Annaliese McNeill, Social Work Student, currently social worker at Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital, Perth

Sarah Firth, Social Work Student, currently Student Consultant, RMIT, Melbourne.

Erin McFadden, Social Work Student, currently social worker, Austin Hospital, Melbourne

Alison Hocking, Manager, Social Work & Cultural Diversity, The Royal Melbourne Hospital, Melbourne

Address for Correspondence:

ljoubert@unimelb.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Practice research in health and mental health social work contributes to an increasing demand for accountability and evidence-informed practice in health settings. Social work students who aspire to work in the health setting are encouraged to develop, not only theoretical knowledge, but competency and confidence to graduate as research-focused practitioners. In addition, educators need to support those students who have career aspirations as research leaders in social work. This is a challenge for educators as integrating the varied skills required to implement research on graduation, requires opportunities within the classroom and fieldwork placement to support students in their learning. In this article the process of engaging students in an existing research study, implemented as part of the academic practitioner collaboration between a university department of social work and fifteen health social work departments, will be described. Students from the qualifying Master of Social Work degree were engaged at different levels of research participation in fieldwork and classroom contexts.

Keywords: *Social work practice research education; health social work; field placement; evidence informed practice; fieldwork education*

INTRODUCTION

Research partnerships between academic institutions and health social work practitioners support the development of an evidence-informed base for social work practice in health and mental health settings. The importance of this cannot be understated given the rising demand for accountability within the profession (Hewson, Walsh, & Bradshaw, 2010). Academic practitioner partnerships can, in addition, provide opportunities for students to engage in and develop research knowledge, competency and confidence. Opportunities for research participation can co-exist alongside field placements which are structured to include research as either a required component of the placement or as the central aspect of the student's field work experience (Hewson et al, 2010).

We describe the participation and process evaluation of forty three students on fieldwork placements, in fifteen social work departments in health and mental health services across Victoria, Australia (see Appendix A) as part of a qualifying Master of Social Work degree. The students participated in a collaborative research study, "Evidencing Social Work Practice in Health and Mental Health," which was developed and implemented within an academic practitioner research partnership between the Department of Social Work, University of Melbourne, and health and mental health social work departments across the state of Victoria in Australia. The university academic and social work managers engaged with the students and field work coordinators to support the students' research training.

Once the fieldwork placement was completed, students were able to continue their research learning from the project. The data analysis, research evaluation and discussion components of the research study were integrated into tutorials as part of the practice research subject taught in the following semester.

The "Evidencing social work practice in Health and Mental Health" research study

Aims

The aims of the Evidencing Health and Mental Health Social Work Practice study are to:

1. Describe patient-specific clinical interventions
2. Define non-specific, patient-attributable activities and non-clinical interventions
3. Clarify theoretical approaches and models informing intervention
4. Define the mode of patient interventions undertaken by social work practitioners.

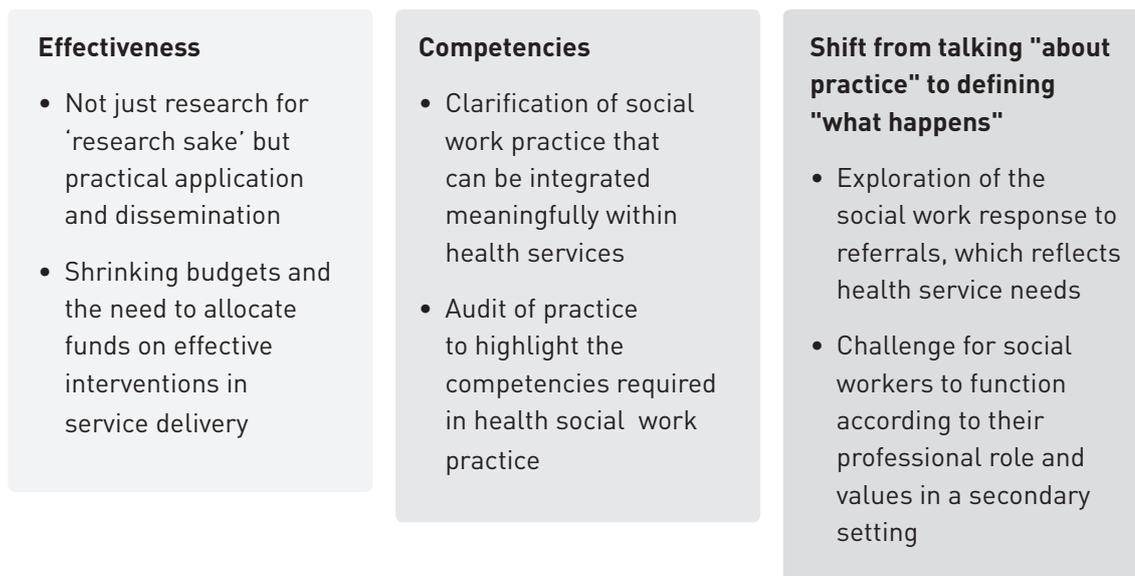
The study arose because social work managers in Victoria were keen to gain an understanding of the current practices of practitioners in their departments by exploring the discipline-specific competencies of social work in a hospital setting. The results provide an evidence-informed base to support both professional and student training programs as well as a classification of professional activities requested by social workers in health and mental health settings.

With increasing cost-cutting initiatives (Auerbach, Roch, Goldstein, Kaminsky, & Heft-Lapente, 2000; Reese & Raymer, 2004), and within a medical model that does not systematically privilege psychosocial concerns (Schroepfer, 2011), social workers have much to gain from examining the positive contribution they make to hospital services.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is a prospective audit of routine hospital and community mental health based social work practice over a 24-hour period. The data were collected via a spreadsheet divided into 5-minute intervals, populated with data codes from a coding sheet and subsequently entered into a database for analysis. Social workers (N=532) were asked to audit their activities over a 24-hour period. The original audit tool was developed in a practitioner academic research collaboration between the University of Melbourne (UOM) (Lynette Joubert) and St Vincent's Hospital's Department of Social Work (SVHM SW) (Sonia Posenelli). In summary, the methodology is: 1) multicenter, strengthening external validity; 2) a prospective, one-day 'snapshot' of social work activity; 3) utilizing an evidence informed audit tool, which 4) delivers a comprehensive and high-quality data set with over 10,000 items of social work activity in health and mental health. The study received ethical approval from the University of Melbourne as a quality improvement study and was, in turn, accepted as a quality improvement strategy by each of the participating health services. One health service requested a minimal risk ethics application which was submitted and approved. The ethics process was completed prior to the students beginning their placement.

The practitioner academic research collaboration utilizing this methodology has progressed in phases. A previous study involved the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre (PMCC) and an Australian Trans-Tasman Collaboration with the University of Auckland. The current phase is a Victorian practice research initiative led by the University of Melbourne and joined by participants from the Victorian Health Social Work Director's Group, and the fifteen Health and Mental Health Social Work Departments which participated in the audit. The research team met regularly to adapt the audit tool for use, and to ensure fidelity of data collection across all sites. Similarly, an educational package and manual was developed and edited to ensure consistency of application. One of the final year qualifying masters social work placement students assisted with the finalization of the manual which became the handbook utilized by each site during data collection. The dataset has become a source of ongoing multiple analyses which promote the continuing collaboration between academic and practitioner research partners.

Figure 1. Conceptual Map of the “Evidencing Health and Mental Health

Value of research placements

While research studies are part of social work curricula internationally, opportunities for students to participate in the research process are challenging and, in general, social work students have limited opportunities to participate as researchers outside the classroom setting (Maidment, Chilvers, Crichton-Hill, & Meadows-Taurua, 2011). This is despite professional bodies such as the *Australian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics* (AASW, 2010) and the *National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics* in the United States stressing the need for research competence (Rubin, Valutis, & Robinson, 2010). There has been a shift towards reflection within practice settings as compared to the usual pedagogical approach of focusing solely on research knowledge and practice skills in the classroom (Satka, Kaariainen, & Yliruka, 2016) but actual practice as a researcher participating in an active research project remains problematic for students in social work.

Despite these difficulties, positive outcomes have been reported from a variety of types of social work placements or practice experiences aimed at increasing engagement with research. These range from research placements in community settings (Maidment et al., 2011); faculty-mentored research programs (Whipple, Hughes, & Bowden, 2015); research placements at a research centre attached to the social work faculty (Hewson et al., 2010); and practical research modules within a social work course (Satka et al., 2016). Community agencies have been encouraged to offer a mix of direct practice and research oriented work, with the aim of increasing understanding of the link between the two (Maidment et al., 2011). A number of models have been developed to understand the learning process of students on research placements. For example, Maidment and colleagues (2011) suggest that the “communities of practice” model which proposes that practical learning occurs through the informal exchange occurring between peers in the workplace, can be utilized when developing research education. In contrast, Satka and colleagues (2016) utilised the “triological learning theory” to understand the combination of learning in a university setting and learning within the workplace. They suggest that social work students conducting research in a practical setting become research minded as a result of the

interaction between knowledge acquisition and participation, which supports the creation of knowledge and facilitates learning.

Student experience in research placements

Social work students have been reported to have an aversion to research due to fear and low self-perceived competency (Epstein, 1987). Research placements can, however, offer an opportunity for students' research skills to develop in a practice setting leading to increased confidence (Hewson et al., 2010). A recent study evaluated how involving junior and senior Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students in a faculty-mentored research program impacted on students' sense of competency across a number of different research skills, and was found to be highly successful (Whipple et al., 2015). Using a pre- and post-test design it was found that students' ratings of their competency over 15 research areas improved, with three of these being statistically significant. Interestingly, anxiety levels of the students did not change. Recurring feedback from the students was that the practical research experience "made research real and less complicated" (p. 399).

The reasons for students choosing a research placement were explored by Hewson and colleagues (2010). They found that many students wanted to strengthen their research skills and develop a deeper understanding of research as well as having a competitive advantage when applying for postgraduate study or employment once they had graduated. Students have reported some challenges with their field placement experience including funding cuts impacting on their projects, prolonged time lines and difficulty adapting the learning agreement given the nature of their placement (Hewson et al., 2010). Another challenge for students is that being on non-traditional social work placements may have an impact on how they establish their professional identity (Scholar, McLaughlin, McCaughan, & Coleman, 2014).

More recently practice research experience in field placements has shifted to incorporate service users' perspectives in service delivery and evaluation. Austin and Isokuortti (2016) proposed a framework to incorporate service user involvement in practice research, which can be implemented in social work research education. They describe five phases including: engagement, recognition, and problem formulation; assessment and service planning, participation and study plan; service implementation, collaboration, and shared data collection; service outcome assessment and shared data analysing; and service transition/ termination, self-advocacy and reporting (p. 17). These phases have built upon traditional research methods and offer students an opportunity to understand the role of service user involvement in practice research.

Student Engagement in the "Evidencing Social Work Practice in Health and Mental Health Study"

The study offered students practical and theoretical research experience at three different levels:

1. Three students who had requested a predominantly practice research placement took a leadership role in the study, supervised by the health social work managers and the university academic.
2. Forty-three students on placement in one of the fifteen health social work departments which participated in the study, participated as part of the research component of their fieldwork placement and were supervised by their fieldwork supervisor in the agency and the health social work manager.
3. Ninety-eight students who were enrolled in the *Researching Social Work Practice 1* subject participated in data entry, data analysis, and discussion of the results.

Group 1: Students on a Health Social Work Practice Research Placement

The study actively engaged three students on their professional placement at North Western Mental Health (NWMH) (two students) and the Peter McCallum Cancer Centre (PMCC) as lead student researchers on the study. These students were provided with meaningful, practical and diverse research experience, project management and leadership skill development opportunities within the Victorian health and mental health sector.

Two of the students completing their placement at NWMH and PMCC were tasked with coordinating and facilitating the training and support for the completion of the project across all the sites associated with these health services. This included the facilitation of a total of fifteen training sessions with staff and students across sites as well the development of the training materials (which included a PowerPoint presentation), providing the research materials to all staff and students, and providing assistance and support (via email and telephone) on the day of the audit. Prior to delivering the training at each site, students engaged with senior health social work staff from each of the sites to coordinate a suitable training date. Students were provided with opportunities to develop their interpersonal communication skills (engagement and rapport-building skills, cross-cultural communication skills and professional communication skills) as well as organizational and project management skills. They reported early on in their placement that this experience assisted in the development of a growing confidence and capacity to effectively manage complex projects.

Database Development

The two students at NWMH expressed an interest in building and managing the customized database to input the data using the online application REDCap (Harris, 2009). They were provided with introductory REDCap training from University of Melbourne staff to build the database shell. They then utilized university academic, supervisor, peer and self-learning to further customize the database to meet the specific needs of the research project. As REDCap was an application that neither student had utilized previously, developing the database required significant collaborative and problem-solving skills within a professional research setting. Following the development of the REDCap database, a user-friendly manual for both student and staff use was developed by the students. These developments were implemented both independently and in close contact with the social work managers and the university academic.

Active student engagement throughout the ‘Evidencing Social Work Research in Health and Mental Health Study’ from the early stages of the project to the data entry stage, provided the research placement students with experience and insight into professional research activity as well as learning and teaching skills beyond the learning outcomes prescribed in the social work curriculum.

Group 2: Students on Health Social Work Fieldwork Placements

All forty-three social work students on placement at one of the research sites became the “Audit Champions.” The Audit Champions worked for the week before the audit date identifying who would be on shift that day, ensuring there were enough paper copies of the audit tool for each staff member, handing out the forms on the day, reminding staff on how to fill in the form, arranging where staff were to leave the completed forms and then collecting the forms.

The Audit Champions also provided encouragement to staff throughout the weeks leading up to the Audit Day and on the day itself. For busy clinicians, having to fill out a lengthy audit tool for every 5-minute block of their day required commitment, interest in, and engagement with, the study. The students helped provide incentives needed to obtain staff cooperation in a way that was engaging and encouraged participation. The rate of participation in the study was 94%. For one service involved in the audit, there were over twenty sites from which the data were collected. The only way this could be managed logistically was to enroll the support of the eight social work students on placement at that service. The students were supported and coordinated by the research placement students who, in turn, were supervised by the student coordinators and academic at each health service. The research team, consisting of research students and each organization’s fieldwork coordinator, supported students on fieldwork placements with an enhanced induction into how to fill out the audit form. They provided advice on how to address the common issues that staff might experience in completing the form. In this way a supported network of student researchers facilitated the data collection across the fifteen health services (532 social workers).

Students completing fieldwork placements at one of the participating health services obtained experience of being engaged in the implementation of a research process, from understanding the study proposal, formulation of the audit tool and ethics process and finally, being engaged in the practical challenges and excitement of implementing the study protocol.

Group 3: Students Enrolled in the Researching Social Work Practice 1 Subject

A tutorial class utilised the “Evidencing Health and Mental Health Social Work Practice” study as a practice research exemplar. The aim of the tutorial was to provide students with the opportunity to work with a meaningful dataset and to receive peer education and support in doing this. Students in the class worked in pairs and were taught by the three research students who had developed the database on placement, on how to understand the construction of the database and the method of entering the data. The use of peer learning not only provided the research students with relevant learning and teaching skills, but also assisted in creating a safe space for their student peers (many of whom had not participated

in research-related activities previously) to develop data entry experience. Facilitating the training sessions required the research students to actively reflect and discuss with each other on how they could best communicate challenging concepts and instructions to their diverse student peers within a supported academic environment

Process evaluation

Process evaluation of student learning as part of an academic practitioner partnership suggests that theoretical teaching and placement supervision offered to students who engaged at any of the three levels enhanced both classroom and fieldwork education in practice research.

The pedagogical benefit can be summarised as follows in a three stage model of *Academic Practitioner Student Training in Research*.

Group 1: Students on a Social Work Practice Research Placement

- Knowledge of the research pathway from proposal to study outcomes;
- Competence in research leadership, including implementation, coordination, writing and teaching;
- Confidence to be a social work practice researcher on graduation.

Group 2: Students on Social Work Fieldwork Placement

- Knowledge and participatory learning about the research pathway;
- Competence in coordinating data collection and understanding the challenges of rigour, interpersonal communication, and scholarship in practice research;
- Confidence to engage in practice research on graduation.

Group 3: Students Enrolled in a Social Work Research Subject

- Knowledge of the research pathway through participatory engagement;
- Competence in working with databases, data entry and analysis;
- Confidence and reduced fear in graduating as a research focused practitioner in social work.

Perhaps the best understanding of the value of the Academic Practitioner Student Training in Research Model is found in the words of one of the students (from Group 1):

Pivotal to my current social work career, was my experience being involved as a student in practice research with a Professor of Social Work and other key Senior Social Work Managers around Victoria.

As a result of my experience on placement I gained firsthand experience in practice research. This was something that I believe gave me a competitive edge on my resume, and ultimately assisted me to gain employment. I have gone on to further engage in practice based research in my current employment as a health social worker, and to develop and coordinate practice research projects.

The experience of being on a predominantly research fieldwork placement involved me as a student in practice research with a “live” data set; in collaborating with various stakeholders; being involved in the development of the online data capture tool; in coordinating the data entry; and being involved in teaching students how to use the database to enter the audit data.

I am appreciative of the research opportunities that were provided to me as they increased my confidence and skill, contributed to my ongoing interest and value in practice based research and sparked my interest in potentially completing a PHD in Social Work. (Erin, 2016)

CONCLUSION

The article describes an integrated practice research study that offered a unique opportunity for students to engage in fieldwork learning as part of a joint project with university partner practitioners. There are core elements of the experience that can be utilized as part of smaller projects offering students a research experience, which we have named *staged process engagement and learning in practice research*. A key element of this approach is for students to be engaged in the study-implementation process from proposal to analysis, and then to be able to contribute to discussion of outcomes. We hoped to encourage students to regard research as an integral part of their future practice. To achieve this, we needed more than classroom lectures to equip them to gain the appropriate knowledge, competence and confidence to engage in practice research on graduation. Not all students envision themselves as researchers in their future careers, but all students can benefit from participating in placement and classroom learning. A research experience can be offered that promotes their increased interest and confidence in research participation which they will be able to use in their practice.

Most importantly, students were offered the opportunity to assist with a range of research tasks required in a research project. The study was highly valued by each social work department which participated. They in turn, valued the students’ participation as well as reinforcing the students’ understanding of the significance of social work practitioner research to the health setting.

References

- Auerbach, C., Roch, b. D., Goldstein, M., Kaminsky, P., & Heft-Lapente, H. (2000). A department of social work uses data to prove its case. *Social Work in Health Care, 32*(1), 9–23.
- Austin, M. J., & Isokuortti, N. (2016). A framework for teaching practice-based research with a focus on service users. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 36*(1), 11–32.
- Australian Association of Social Work. (2010) *Code of Ethics*. Australian Association of Social Work, Canberra. ISBN: 978-0-9808661-0-0
- Epstein, I. (1987). Pedagogy of the perturbed: Teaching research to the reluctant. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 1*, 71–89.
- Harris, P. A. (2009). Research electronic data capture (REDCap) – A metadata-driven methodology and workflow process for providing translational research informatics support. *Journal of Biomedical Informatics, 42*(2), 377–381.
- Hewson, J. A., Walsh, C. A., & Bradshaw, C. (2010). Enhancing social work research education through research field placements. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER), 3*(9), 7–16.
- Maidment, J., Chilvers, D., Crichton-Hill, Y., & Meadows-Taurua, K. (2011). Promoting research literacy during the social work practicum. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work, 34*(4), 3-13.
- Reese, D. J., & Raymer, M. (2004). Relationships between social work involvement and hospice outcomes: Results of the National Hospice Social Work Survey. *Social Work, 49*(3), 415–422.
- Rubin, D., Valutis, S., and Robinson, B. (2010) Social work education and student research projects: a survey of program directors. *Journal of Social Work Education. Wntr, 46*(1) p39-55.
- Satka, M., Kääriäinen, A., & Yliruka, L. (2016). Teaching Social Work Practice Research to Enhance Research-Minded Expertise. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 36*(1), 84–101.
- Scholar, H., McLaughlin, H., McCaughan, S., & Coleman, A. (2014). Learning to be a social worker in a non-traditional placement: Critical reflections on social work, professional identity and social work education in England. *Social Work Education, 33*(8), 998–1016.
- Schroepfer, T. (2011). Oncology social work in palliative care. *Current problems in cancer, 35*(6), 357-364.
- Whipple, E. E., Hughes, A., & Bowden, S. (2015). Evaluation of a BSW research experience: Improving student research competency. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*(4), 397–409.

Appendix A: Collaborating Institutions

INVESTIGATOR	ROLE	INSTITUTION
Bridget Wall	Manager, Social Work	Alfred Health
Sharon Sutherland	Manager, Social Work	Alfred Psychiatry
Debra Leahy	Manager, Social Work, Interpreting, Aboriginal Health and Pastoral Care	Austin Health
Catherine Ludbrook	Clinical Manager, Social Work	Ballarat Health Services
Robyn Van Ingen	Manager of Social Work and Aboriginal Health	Barwon Health
Tory Whitman	Manager, Social Work/Psychology	Cabrini
Glenda Kerridge	Manager, Sub-acute Social Work	Eastern Health
Marg Petrie	Social Work Manager	Epworth Health
Julia Blackshaw	Manager, Social Work & Cultural Diversity	Melbourne Health
Carol Quayle	Clinical Manager, Social Work	Monash Health
Lisa Hebel	Social Work Clinical Educator	North Western Mental Health
Alison Hocking	Head of Social Work	Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Penelope Vye	Manager, Social Work	Royal Women's Hospital
Lisa Braddy	Manager, Social Work	St Vincent's, Melbourne
Anita Morris	Manager, Social Work	Western Health
Nicole Hill	Lecturer, Social Work	University of Melbourne

Leading Through Collaboration: The National Field Education Network

Wendy Rollins, Ronnie Egan, Ines Zuchowski, Mary Duncan, Phyllis Chee, Patricia Muncey, Nicole Hill and Maree Higgins

Wendy Rollins, National Professional Practice Coordinator, Australian Catholic University
Ronnie Egan, PhD, RMIT
Ines Zuchowski, PhD, James Cook University
Mary Duncan, Manager Field Education, Flinders University
Phyllis Chee, PhD, Griffith University
Patricia Muncey, Field Education, University of South Australia
Nicole, PhD, The University of Melbourne
Maree Higgins, Manager Work Integrated Learning, University of New South Wales

Address for Correspondence:

wendy.rollins@acu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Social work field education is under pressure across the globe, including in Australia. Current application of neoliberal principles to education and human services policy and service delivery impact on social work practice, social work education and the availability and delivery of practice placements. Social work educators are concerned about delivering quality social work education so that students can engage in supervised service delivery in preparation for professional social work practice. Field education staff in universities across the country experience significant challenges in ensuring and organising increasing numbers of quality student placements.

The formation of a national leadership group was triggered by a collective realisation that all university field education programs were facing similar challenges. The purpose of a national group was to better respond to the identified challenges and identify directions for research. Collaboration has been effectively used across university-based field education programs as a leadership approach, in the development of the Australian National Field Educators Network (NFEN). This paper reports on the formation of the NFEN and the resulting identification of six themes affecting provision of social work field education as an example of collaborative leadership. The paper concludes with an appraisal of the opportunities and challenges of taking a collaborative approach in developing a national response and working as a unified national organisation.

Keywords: *Leadership; Collaboration; Placement; Field; Quality; Social work education; Social work*

INTRODUCTION

In Australia, social work field education is a significant component of the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (Qualifying) (MSW (PQ)) curricula located across 30 university social work schools. Guided by the social work accreditation body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), and via the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS), it is the responsibility of university programs to ensure that every enrolled student is allocated at least two placements where practice learning occurs (AASW, 2012). Each social work placement requires the collaboration of the placement agency, the university, social work placement supervisors and liaison visitors to ensure the student experience meets education standards and that student learning is appropriately supported and assessed (AASW, 2012).

The field provides the learning context and the social work supervisors for individual placements. Social workers external to the university significantly contribute to the learning and assessment of student placement learning. Practising social workers have seen placement supervision as a responsibility and an important commitment to sustain the profession, a view promoted and reinforced by the AASW. It is the collaboration between university-based field education programs, the social workers who undertake supervision and liaison roles and the staff employed by the placement agencies that has endured, making social work placements possible in the prevailing context. Indeed, collaboration is a hallmark of social work placement learning in Australia, and social work field education is, in effect, a role model for collaborative practice.

This paper discusses the collaboration manifest in social work field education programs that precipitated the identification of common pressures. A common desire to respond to these pressures led to the formation of the NFEN. An overview of the Network's achievements to date is provided. The paper begins with a discussion about the current contexts of field education.

CURRENT CONTEXT FOR UNIVERSITY-BASED FIELD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Over the last 20 years, as neoliberal policies and practices have increasingly dominated tertiary education and human service organisations, social work field education programs have experienced increasing pressure in their aim to find at least two good quality placements per program for each student (Hanlen, 2011; Noble & Sullivan, 2009; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). The effects of neoliberalism on social work field education and social work generally have been thoroughly documented (Chenoweth, 2012; Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Healy, 2014; Noble & Sullivan, 2009; Zuchowski, 2011, 2014). Neoliberalism is defined here as:

... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional

framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

Field education is a core component of tertiary social work education. While social work field education programs are established parts of academic social work programs, field education support has often not been regarded as an academic pursuit and so has not enjoyed the same status as research and teaching. This situation has not helped field education navigate the additional challenges resulting from neoliberal approaches to management of university education. Due to the advent of neoliberalism, and the subsequent marketisation and corporatisation of universities, social work field education has been confronted with securing dramatically increased numbers of placements in health and human services sectors that have been less able to offer placements. A corollary of this trend is the reduction of discipline-specific positions that has resulted in a relative decline of agency-based social workers and increasing reliance on externally available social workers to provide student supervision (Chee, 2016). In a managerial environment where schools of social work are competing for the same placements, the NFEN set out to address the concerning prevailing context and to develop a collective collaborative response.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration is an important strategy in leadership approaches that seek to counteract the spirit and outcomes of neoliberalism and promote sustainable change (Weeks, 2003). Weeks argues that collaborative activity and collective processes that increase capacity for responsiveness underpin collaborative leadership. Such leadership includes consultative and collaborative decision-making and information sharing. It facilitates organisational and policy development and can enable the kind of advocacy effort needed to change ineffective structures. Apart from the historical collaborative foundation that underpins the planning of each and every placement in social work field education in Australia, there has been a strong tradition of state-based collaborative networks and associations between university field education programs in Victoria (Cleak, Hawkins, Laughton, & Williams, 2014), New South Wales and Queensland, and collaboration also exists between the two social work programs universities in South Australia (Drake, Pillay, & Diamandi, 2016).

It can be argued that current rates of change in the broader public policy environment both demand and undermine interdependent and partnership approaches. Mitchell (n.d.) contends that it is impossible for organisations to undertake change on their own. This is particularly true of university social work programs which are interdependent with industry to endorse graduates and facilitate their transition into the workforce. In his examination of private–public partnerships, Mitchell identifies the elements required for a successful private–public partnership in the human services sector. These include a strong legal and regulatory framework, transparent and accountable processes, suitable policies, commitment to the public good, a shared understanding, resources and being responsive to consumers and the broader community (n.d., p. 3). The principles for private–public partnership (Carnwell & Carson, 2009) are identified as:

- working towards common purpose;
- ensuring a transparent and non-hierarchical organisational structure;
- applying cooperation as an organisational strategy; and
- valuing of knowledge and expertise over position and role.

While universities and agencies are not specifically represented by the public–private characterisation, they do work in partnership, and such principles reflect the type of national approach that university field education staff identified as necessary.

Many partnerships and collaborative ventures exist within a pressured and competitive environment. Despite the intense competitive pressures that exist in field education, the NFEN has adopted collaboration as a guiding principle, and to a large extent, has been able to adhere to this principle in practice.

FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL FIELD EDUCATION NETWORK

The widespread concern shared amongst university-based field education programs about the pressures in field education throughout 2013 and 2014 led to the decision to hold a forum for field education programs to articulate the identified issues and to explore the potential of forming a national field education group. In 2015 a workshop of Australian-university-based social work field education programs occurred. A general question posed to workshop participants at this inaugural meeting ascertained interest in the idea of forming a national leadership group. This question met with a unanimous and positive response and resulted in the National Field Education Network (NFEN).

The NFEN currently represents 186 members across 31 university field education programs, placement agencies, institutes and social work field educators and liaison visitors. The inaugural NFEN workshop reached agreement about the stated purpose of the NFEN – to facilitate national collaboration in research and to better respond to current pressure points and themes related to the delivery of quality social work field placements. Terms of reference for the NFEN were also developed at this time. The specific aims of the NFEN include being:

- a forum for identifying and responding to social work field education programs issues and common NFEN goals;
- a community of learning for social work field education programs; and
- a space where information pertaining to social work field education is collated and accessible.

NFEN comprises staff members of social work programs at Australian universities and any field education staff member can join the network. The leadership group comprises at least one member from every Australian state and territory, and the group meets monthly to

progress the issues identified in the annual workshops. The work of the NFEN is guided by principles of transparency, collaboration, inclusivity and leadership. These principles are integral to the NFEN developing credibility and integrity. Since the September 2015 meeting, the NFEN has made considerable progress in establishing a governance structure. A premise of the NFEN is that collaboration and partnership across university social work programs is required at a national level to address the critical and widespread issues facing field education.

The inaugural meeting of the NFEN in September 2015 confirmed there was broad agreement about key issues and full agreement was expressed about the importance of a unified response to articulate and find solutions to these issues. Since early discussion in 2015, there has been explicit and continued acknowledgement amongst the group that collaboration within a competitive neoliberal context is inherently challenging and may even undermine NFEN's aims over time. However, this challenge is not confined to universities as many health and human service organisations also seek to collaborate about placement organisation, though they are also in a competitive context.

PROCESSES OF THE NATIONAL FIELD EDUCATION NETWORK

Scholarship and research about field education has been identified as an urgent priority in social work field education, perhaps more so than other parts of the curriculum. Field educators anecdotally describe a crisis in implementing best pedagogical practices (Bogo, 2015). It was considered important, therefore, to bring together the available information to clarify a research agenda, a goal that has influenced the development and progress of the NFEN.

Gathering information – the scoping survey

The initial 2015 NFEN workshop planning group decided to undertake a scoping survey to gain a more detailed picture of the issues field education programs were facing and the importance programs were attaching to these issues. An invitation was sent to all university field education staff inviting them to attend a national field education meeting and asking them to complete a short survey in preparation for the meeting. Recipients were asked to forward the survey to others in their university networks. A total of 44 responses to the survey questions were received. The information was used by the workshop planning group to develop the inaugural agenda of the 2015 Melbourne NFEN workshop. The survey revealed a widespread concern about the barriers to delivering quality social work education experiences to students, a collective desire to respond to identified pressures and the need for research. The results of the survey identified five key pressures facing field education programs. These were: finding sufficient suitable placements; ensuring suitably qualified social work supervision; responding to complex student circumstances; addressing the perception that field education has lower academic standing compared with other subjects in the curriculum; and responding to the perceived need for alternative placement models.

Prioritising action

At the inaugural meeting, 46 participants from 22 schools of social work came together to discuss the findings from the survey. From this discussion, six themes relating to the

context of field education in Australia were identified, forming the basis for the prioritising of action. The workshop also provided an opportunity to discuss differences between cooperation, coordination and collaboration within a competitive environment, issues that were also identified through the survey data analysis. This was used as the starting point to develop governance within the national network and establish draft terms of reference which includes:

- building the knowledge base of social work field education through collaborative research;
- providing a forum for professional relationships and meaningful collaboration to identify and respond to common field education issues;
- advocating as a collective voice on social work field education issues; and
- scoping draft responses to ASWEAS requests.

The importance of reaching agreement about on what and how we can work together was critical and goes to the heart of trust and relationship building, key features of collaborative practice which also reflect the values of the social work profession and the discipline. These four concepts were endorsed by the meeting participants and have since become the NFEN's guiding principles.

The identification of themes

Six broad themes of primary concern were identified during the inaugural meeting. Through collaborative discussions and research these themes were refined and further developed. The themes identified linked to the aforementioned pressure points that impact field education programs in every state and territory in Australia. These related to professional issues, supervision (for example, new models), student issues, the placement agency, industrial issues and administration requirements, and policy and regulation.

1. Profession

Field education is important to the profession and the profession's standing in the service field. It was suggested that the range of models in field education needed to be explored and that the banding in university funding did not reflect the cost associated with field education and its significance within the curriculum.

2. Supervision

There is a reduced availability of placements with onsite social work qualified supervisors and an increased reliance on external supervision in field education. The emergence of external supervision as a more common form of supervision in placements suggests the importance of training of supervisors and building capacity in the field and profession to have qualified supervisors available and trained. Other models of supervision were explored and the relevance of postgraduate supervision courses discussed.

3. Students

Field education is affected by the changing demographic profile of the student body, and the complexity of student needs. Of particular concern are the issues identified by the NFEN that relate to supporting international students in their placement learning. For example, students may have limited awareness and understanding of the local human service context and can struggle with western conceptualisations of professional practice including communication. Other issues that need further exploration include readiness and fitness for practice, outcomes for students, students' and industry's expectations, marketisation of placement learning, student involvement in placement finding, the impact of student poverty on placement learning and managing student risk in placement.

4. Placement agency

The increased student numbers, pressures on the field, sector changes and difficulties for finding placements were discussed with regard to the placement agencies. Balancing benefits in agencies having students on placement against the demands of high agency staff workloads was discussed. Alternative models of supervision and placements, such as student units and group supervision, and setting of placements outside traditional areas were also considered. Other matters that emerged in the discussion about agency placement issues included confidentiality, heeding the student voice, student-placement matching and risk-averse practices.

5. Industrial issues and administration requirements

It was recognised that social work educators in field education faced several industrial issues often connected to the administrative requirements of their positions. Discussions explored the difficulties of quantifying work, costs of setting up placements in non-traditional areas, use of learning technologies, managing risk and aggression. Specific industrial issues highlighted were the differences between academic and administrative/professional roles, casualisation of field education staff, union support and the conditions of work in the sector, including supervising staff in casual roles without recognition of this work.

6. Policy and regulation

Many questions were asked about field education policy and regulation including the necessity and rationale for AASW field education requirements and university practices governing the number of student enrolments in social work degrees. It was recognised that current field education policies and regulations have adverse impacts on student wellbeing, such as exacerbating poverty and these need to be specifically explored. Regulations and policies that guide field education are set by the AASW, universities, government departments and placement agencies. Via the AASW accreditation, the AASW has guidelines about, for example, program accreditation, recognition of prior learning (RPL), placement hours and work-based placements. Universities formulate learning outcomes, policies and standards of education and pedagogy. Governments at all levels provide funding, set standards and directions for education and related issues such as student housing while the placement agency's policies and regulations guide procedures, practices, and options for placements.

Pressure Points

The pressure points identified are, for the most part, discussed in the academic literature (see for example, Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Zuchowski, 2011, 2014) and chiefly include: finding sufficient suitable placements, the capacity of human service and health sectors to provide quality learning experience for students (in accordance with accreditation requirements), the pedagogical consequences of an overburdened system on student learning and finally, the effect of student-related pressures on placement learning and experience.

A consequence of increasing pressure in field education is the degree to which the current organisation of social work field education impedes quality pedagogical practice within and across institutions. The following section provides an explanation of key pressures and how they are experienced within social work programs.

1. Finding sufficient suitable placements

A significant and widely documented problem is finding sufficient suitable placements for social work students (Cleak & Smith, 2012; Zuchowski, 2016). Over the past decade, changed funding policies for higher education informed by neoliberal policies and practices were introduced using marketisation and “user-pays” mechanisms. Currently, universities are heavily reliant on this source of income to maintain or improve their fiscal sustainability (Van Onselen, 2015). This has led to a dramatic increase in student enrolments causing significant anxiety that the quantity of placement learning environments will not keep pace with demand. Indeed, placement supply has been further jeopardised in some sectors, as many publicly provided services have suffered funding cutbacks and social worker workplace stress (Gillingham, 2016; McFadden, Campbell & Taylor, 2015; Storey & Billingham, 2001). In 2009 the Australian government introduced a measure that removed the limit on public university places that allowed a place for every domestic Bachelors student who met university admission criteria. Between 2009 and 2013, this has resulted in an increase in Commonwealth Supported Places from 440,000 to 541,000 (Dow, 2014, p. 66). Enrolment of international students has also significantly increased over this period and these students are subject to a higher fee structure.

In Australia, the number of enrolled BSW students doubled from 3,389 to 6,787 between 1989 and 2007 (Healy & Lonne, 2010, cited in Smith, Cleak & Vreugdenhil, 2014). There has also been a significant rise in the number of postgraduate social work students. Between 2008 and 2009, there was a substantial increase in the number of students undertaking the Masters (Qualifying) programs in Social Work. Across Australia, approximately 680 students have enrolled in MSW(Q) programs since the programs were recognised by the AASW in 2008 (Healy & Lonne, 2010). The risk to high academic standards has been noted as another concern of the social work field education sector (Healy & Lonne, 2010).

Because the minimum number of field education experiences and hours per student is set by the AASW (as the accreditation body), the number of placements and placement hours required rises in direct proportion to the increasing number of students. While the undersupply of quality placements is not new (Fook & Cleak, 1994), the current higher levels of student enrolments seriously challenge university capacity to ensure quality placement learning within the social work curricula.

2. The human service and health sector's capacity to provide quality learning experience for students in accordance with accreditation requirements

Neoliberal practices have impacted beyond higher education to the public sector generally, leading to higher caseloads, increased reporting obligations and risk management, and austerity and welfare reforms, which exacerbate the pressures in social work field education as supervisors based in busy organisations are less able to support student placements (Chenoweth, 2012). Placement shortages are evident beyond Australia. In Canada, USA and Britain, authors have highlighted that field education faces a significant challenge in finding supervisors and internships for students (McKee, Muskat, & Perlman, 2015; Torry, Furness, & Wilkinson, 2005; Wayne et al., 2006).

For most university programs in Australia social work field education is heavily reliant on the goodwill of the relationships that field education programs develop with human service and health sectors, discussed further later. However, universities have become increasingly competitive, and have introduced a range of strategies that threaten this goodwill, for example, arrangements which tie specific organisations to providing specific numbers of placements (Torry et al., 2005). Such arrangements can lead to difficulties for colleagues at other universities in finding adequate numbers of social work placements. Poor communication of capacity and preferential arrangements has led to last-minute rushes for placements, disruption of university–industry placement relationships and disorientation in the organisation of placements, undermining quality student placement learning (Torry et al., 2005). Moreover, it threatens the long-established collaboration that underpins provision of social work field education which sustain service networks.

The compulsory nature of field education means that a significant share of the responsibility for training social work students falls on an already overburdened field (Smith et al., 2014). While the number of social work programs has expanded over the last three decades, major growth has also occurred in a number of related degree and diploma programs in human services, community welfare and applied social and behavioural science, all of which have embedded practicum components. The rapid expansion of social work and human services educational programs has also coincided with substantial growth in the health and community services workforce, adding to existing pressures (Healy & Lonne, 2010).

An area of increasing concern is the number of placements without social work supervisors. Where a qualified social worker is not available to provide the required social work supervision, universities contract “external supervisors” who offer social work supervision that complements the supervision provided by non-social-work staff in the agency. Student placements with external social work supervision are increasing. These placements have to be carefully negotiated to ensure optimal learning experience for students, to ensure clear and effective collaboration between all parties involved (the internal and external supervisor, the student, the liaison person and university staff) and to ensure that they all work in the interests of the student and their learning (Zuchowski, 2016).

3. Pedagogical consequences of an overburdened system

Increasing pressures on health and human services organisations places unfair expectations on the professional and non-professional employees of the services who provide the social

work supervision that is so critical for student practice learning. Despite multiple studies indicating the supervisory relationship is central to student learning on placement Smith et al. (2014) found that only 70% of students experience supervision in accordance with the ASWEAS Guidelines. While it is recognised that students' learning is enhanced when their practice was observed and feedback was given, Maidment (2000) and Smith et al. (2014) found that students reported a lack of observation of their practice by their social work supervisor.

4. Pressures experienced by, and capacity of, students

The current student body in social work makes the provision of field education complex. Increasing student numbers are working full-time and have other competing demands including family commitments, that compromise, and in many cases, undermine, their capacity to meet placement requirements (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000; Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Many of these students express the need for fewer contact hours on placement due to the competing demands on their time. Since field education requires students to spend large blocks of time in the field, paid employment is frequently sacrificed, leading students to report considerable financial stress while on placement (Baglow, 2014; Maidment, 2003) or to continue working extensive hours whilst undergoing full-time placement (Johnstone, Brough, Crane, Marston, & Correa-Velez, 2016).

Increased financial pressure with its adverse impacts for secure housing tenure and maintaining good health has also been observed anecdotally by field education staff in Australia. Gursansky and Le Sueur (2012) report that most students in Australia who work in paid employment do so out of necessity and are therefore unable to reduce working hours to undertake placement (Johnstone et al., 2013).

The student population in social work and other related human service disciplines is demographically very diverse (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2011). It is a population that is predominantly female (Healy & Lonne, 2010; Martin & Healy, 2010), includes many international students with different levels of language ability and cultural backgrounds (Healy & Lonne, 2010). While this diversity adds richness and depth to the study body, aspects such as lower levels of verbal and written English skills reduces their potential to be viewed as suitable for placement by agencies. Anecdotal evidence from the social work programs indicates it is not uncommon for these students to experience racism from staff or clients of host agencies or others they meet in the course of their placement. The combined effect of the "whiteness" of Australian health and human service agencies and students from cultural backgrounds outside that whiteness discourse, is that racism is commonly experienced, as has been noted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bennett, Green, Gilbert, & Bessarab, 2013; Gair, Miles, Savage, & Zuchowski, 2015). In addition, social work cohorts contain proportionally more mature age students, students with disabilities and mental health issues and students with wide-ranging relevant experience who are seeking formal academic qualifications (Healy & Lonne, 2010).

Advancing the Action Agenda

At the conclusion of the September 2015 NFEN meeting, the following three priority action areas were unanimously endorsed:

1. Relationship with AASW, ASWEAS, and Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (the Council)

It was agreed that an active working collaboration with the AASW was essential for the NFEN and the profession as a whole. The purpose of such collaboration was to advocate for quality student placement experience and learning, particularly in light of the 2016 planned review of the ASWEAS standards. In the longer term, members agreed on approaching the AASW to consider new models of field education, for example, simulation or innovative use of technology and cross-discipline activities. Two members of the Council attended the 2015 workshop and they issued an invitation to the NFEN to attend the next Council meeting to provide an overview of the priorities and process of the NFEN.

2. Research

Several potential research areas were identified. There was recognition that the scoping survey identified themes and pressures relating to the delivery of quality field education programs, however, that detail was lacking. There was also an acknowledgement that research conducted might challenge as well as enhance the pedagogical basis of field education requirements in Australia.

3. Communication and Relationships

Developing communication strategies and forming and consolidating relationships between NFEN and agencies and agency-based social workers, was identified as priority for building collaboration across the entire field education sector. It was also agreed that an online platform would enable communications and collaborative practices within the NFEN, including the storage of documents and resources. Marketing of the NFEN was also recognised as a priority as this would help to raise the profile of field education with key stakeholders in the sector.

DISCUSSION

As outlined above, the NFEN is premised on the view that collaboration at a national level is required to address the critical issues facing field education. Agreed terms of reference now define the NFEN's role. The NFEN strives to be an effective platform for a collective, national response to issues and challenges facing social work field education in Australia. The NFEN has gained significant support and commitment from field education staff across Australian social work programs. Hall and Wallace (1993) define collaboration as close mutually supportive working relationships where participants "value this way of working highly enough to commit themselves to it: they choose to engage in joint work to achieve joint goals" (p. 105). Collaborative leadership increases capacity for responsiveness, and is guided by collectivist principles, consultative and collaborative decision making and information sharing to enable organisational and policy development and advocacy to change the structures (Weeks, 2003).

The ongoing work of the NFEN is undertaken by the NFEN committee that includes field education representatives from all Australian states and territories. In addition to this committee, task groups, comprised of both general and committee members, have formed to address each of the identified priority areas. There is biannual communication through the NFEN newsletter about the work of the task groups, notification of events and resources, links to current field education research projects, core committee work, activities

of the state-based groups and preparation for the annual NFEN face-to-face workshop. To date, three national meetings have taken place. The broader membership joins different task groups, provides opportunities for consultation and welcomes their participation in working together on shared concerns. This open participation and the NFEN principles has been the bedrock of the achievements of the NFEN to date. The collaborative process of identifying field education issues, developing strategies and working on priorities meant the NFEN undertook a process where members were able to be meaningfully engaged and feel a sense of ownership, agency and achievement.

Collaboration at a national level is not without its challenges. It requires significant commitment from field education staff. As the NFEN consolidates direction and activity, maintaining principles of collaboration and leadership will continue to be challenged in the current competitive environment. While similar issues and challenges are experienced across many programs, different resources, priorities and responses exist across programs. More time is needed to elicit any unstated tensions and build the necessary trust within relationships to be a sustainable and effective national voice. Insufficient time and opportunity for NFEN members to unpack the practicalities of how the group will work together is a challenge and this task involves strengthening the governance structure of NFEN. For example, videoconference meetings have been fraught with technical difficulties, and the large numbers at some meetings has frequently complicated and limited inclusive conversation. An additional, and important, priority for NFEN is how best to engage the expertise, practice and field education experience evident in the vast pool of agencies and practitioners that support and supervise social work students on placement.

As the group moves to actions, having this conversation becomes even more imperative and precipitates addressing tough questions such as: What do we think collaboration means? What do we agree to collaborate on and is collaboration required for all activities? Do field education staff members have the delegated authority from their institutions to share institutional information, for example, information around the costs of external supervision to programs? Do all members have to collaborate on the same issues, particularly given the needs of programs differ? What are the implications for NFEN's capacity if some field education programs want to collaborate but cannot? Do we need a written agreement to document the different levels of working together or is trust enough? The purpose, platform and processes of the NFEN continue to evolve. The question of how we sustain the NFEN is important for its role as a leader in Australian social work field education.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the shared and serious pressures facing field education programs as identified through the national scoping survey and meetings of the NFEN, linking these findings to the literature, and discussing the benefits of collaborating nationally in this context. Addressing these present changes and challenges cannot be left to individual field education staff, and the NFEN model has implications for the broader university sector, professional bodies, agencies and other key stakeholders. Collaboration at a national level strengthens the effectiveness of a collective voice in addressing organisational and policy

development and advocating for structural change. The NFEN's action agenda identifies processes that address and advocate for these issues at the appropriate level.

While a collaborative approach maximises positive professional relationships and advances strategies in achieving joint goals (Hall & Wallace, 1993), this discussion acknowledges that the broader competitive context in which field education operates inevitably impacts on the Network's potential to operate as a unified national organisation – one based on transparency and trust. Critical dialogue that promotes collaborative process and the capacity to identify and name the challenges requires “difficult conversations.” Demonstrating this capacity is integral to the NFEN philosophy and powerfully determines the NFEN's modus operandi into the future.

References

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2012). Guideline 1.2: Guidance on field education programs. *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)* (pp. 1–69). Canberra, ACT: AASW.
- Baglow, L. (2014). Findings from the AASW student survey on income support. *AASW National Bulletin*, 24(4), 1–21.
- Beddoe, L., & Worrall, J. (2012). The future of fieldwork in a market economy, *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 7(1), 19–32.
- Bennett, B., Green, S., Gilbert S., & Bessarab, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Our voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work*. South Yarra, VIC: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical social work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 43(3), 317–324. doi:10.1007/s10615-015-0526-5
- Carnwell, R., & Carson, A. (2009). The concepts of partnership and collaboration. In R. Carnwell & J. Buchanan, *Effective practice in health, social care and criminal justice: A partnership approach* (2nd ed., pp. 3–21). Berkshire, UK: McGraw-Hill.
- Chee, P. (2016). Fluidity and space: Social work student learning in field supervision. In I. Taylor, M. Lefevre, M. Bogo, & B. Teater (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of social work education* (pp. 232–242). London, UK: Routledge.
- Chenoweth, L. (2012). Troubling times? Strategies for countering contemporary challenges in social work and human services practice. In V. Pulla, L. Chenoweth, A. Francis, & S. Bakaj (Eds.), *Papers in strengths based practice* (pp. 66).
- Cleak, H., Hawkins, L., Laughton, J., & Williams, J. (2014). Creating a standardised teaching and learning framework for social work field placements. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 49–64. doi:10.1080/0312407x.2014.932401
- Cleak, H., & Smith, D. (2012). Student satisfaction with models of field placement supervision. *Australian Social Work*, 65(2), 243–258.
- Dow, C. (2014). Reform of the higher education demand driven system (revised) in Budget review 20014-15 Parliamentary Library Research Paper **Series 2013–14**, Commonwealth of Australia.
- Drake, R., Pillay, S., & Diamandi, S. (2016, September). *A model of external supervision for social work students doing placements in schools*. Paper presented at the 2016 ANZSWWER Symposium, Advancing our Critical Edge in Social Welfare Education, Townsville, James Cook University.
- Fook, J., & Cleak, H. (1994). The state of field education in Australia – Results of a national survey. In J. Ife, S. Leitmann, & P. Murphy (Eds.), *Advances in social work and welfare education – A collection of conference papers given at the National Conference of the Australian Association of Social Work and Welfare Education (AASWWE)* (pp. 29–42). Perth, WA: University of Western Australia.
- Gair, S., Miles, D., Savage, D., & Zuchowski, I. (2015). Racism unmasked: The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in social work field placements. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 32–48.
- Gillingham, P. (2016) Social work and child protection in Australia: Whose job is it anyway? Practice: 1-14.
- Gursansky, D., & Le Sueur, E. (2012). Conceptualising field education in the twenty-first century: Contradiction, challenges and opportunities. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 31(7), 914–931.
- Hall, V., & Wallace, M. (1993). Collaboration as a subversive activity: A professional response to externally imposed competition between schools? *School Organisation*, 13(2), 101–117.

- Hanlen, P. (2011). Community engagement: Managers' viewpoints. In C. Noble & M. Hendrickson (Eds.), *Social work field education and supervision across Asia Pacific* (pp. 221–241). Sydney, NSW: Sydney University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neo-liberalism*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Healy, K. (Ed.). (2014). *Social work theories in context: Creating frameworks for practice*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healy, K., & Lonne, B. (2010). *The social work and human services workforce: Report from a national study of education training and workforce needs*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Hemy, M., Boddy, J., Chee, P., & Sauvage, D. (2016). Social work students “juggling” field placement. *Social Work Education*, 35(2), 215–228.
- Johnstone, E., Brough, M., Crane, P., Marston G., & Correa-Velez, I. (2013). Field placement and the impact of financial stress on social work and human service students. *Australian Social Work*, 69(4), 481–494.
- Maidment, J. (2000). Methods used to teach social work students in the field: A research report from New Zealand. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 19(2), 145–154. doi:10.1080/02615470050003520
- Maidment, J. (2003). Developing trends in social work field education. *Women in Welfare Education* (6). Retrieved from <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Women-in-Welfare-Education/199990329.html>
- Martin, B., & Healy, J. (2010). *Who works in community services? A profile of Australian workforces in child protection, juvenile justice, disability services and general community services*. Adelaide, SA: National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University.
- McFadden, P. Campbell, A., & Taylor, B. (2015). Resilience and burnout in child protection social work: Individual and organisational themes from a systematic Literature Review *British Journal of Social Work* 5(5): 1546-1563.
- McInnis, C., James, R., & Hartley, R. (2000). *Trends in the first year experience in Australian universities*. Melbourne, VIC: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.
- McKee, E., Muskat, E., & Perlman, T. (2015). Students today, educators tomorrow: Shaping the social work curriculum to enhance field education. *Field Educator*, 5(2), 1–6. Retrieved from http://www2.simmons.edu/ssw/fe/i/McKee_Shaping.pdf
- Mitchell, M. (n.d.). An overview of public private partnerships in health. Retrieved from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ihs/publications/pdf/PPP-final-MDM.pdf>
- Morley, C., & Dunstan, J. (2013). Critical reflection: A response to neoliberal challenges to field education? *Social Work Education*, 32(2), 141–156, doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.730141
- Noble, C., & Sullivan, J. (2009). Is social work still a distinctive profession? Students, supervisors and educators reflect. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 11(1), 89–107.
- Smith, D., Cleak, H., & Vreugdenhil V. (2014). “What are they really doing?” An exploration of student learning activities in field placement. *Australian Social Work*, 68(4), 515–531. doi:10.1080/0312407X.2014.960433
- Storey, J., & Billingham, J. (2001). Occupational stress and social work. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 20(6), 659–670.
- Torry, B., Furness, S., & Wilkinson, P. (2005). The importance of agency culture and support in recruiting and retaining social workers to supervise students on placement. *Practice*, 17(1), 29–38. doi:10.1080/09503150500058025
- Van Onselen, P. (2015, January 10). Reforming higher education should go beyond fee deregulation. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/peter-van-onselen/reforming-higher-education-should-go-beyond-fee-deregulation/news-story/57cfb69526fd0bef0dbf768b2b9b2257>
- Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2006). The need for radical change in field education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 42(1), 161–169.
- Weeks, W. (2003). Women: Developing feminist practice in women's services. In J. Allan, Pease, B., & Briskman, L. *Critical Social Work*, (pp. 107–123). Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Zuchowski, I. (2011). Social work student placements with external supervision: Last resort or value-adding in the Asia-Pacific? In C. Noble & M. Henrickson (Eds.), *Social work field education and supervision across the Asia Pacific* (pp.373-95). Sydney, NSW: Sydney University Press.
- Zuchowski, I. (2014). Planting the seeds for someone else's discussion: Experiences of task supervisors supporting social work placements. *The Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 13(3), 5–23. doi:10.1921/12202130105
- Zuchowski, I., (2016). Getting to know the context: The complexities of providing off-site supervision in social work practice learning *British Journal of Social Work*, 46, 409–426.

Field Education as Signature Pedagogy – Insights for Australian social work

Shirley Ledger, Wendy Hillman, Bobby Harreveld and Darren de Warren

Shirley Ledger, Lecturer, Central Queensland University, Brisbane

Wendy Hillman, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton

Bobby Harreveld, Professor and Deputy Dean Research, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton

Darren de Warren, Central Queensland University, Noosa Heads

Address for Correspondence:

s.ledger@cqu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Field education has been identified as the signature pedagogy of the profession. Field education is also being said to be in crisis. The attribution of signature pedagogy status is contested as there is limited research where Shulman's 2005 framework has been applied in its entirety either in the United States or Australia. A review of the literature concerning signature pedagogy in social work highlights an absence of Australian perspectives and contexts. This makes it unclear whether field education is signature pedagogy for the profession in Australia. Further research and professional reflection is required to identify congruence with signature pedagogy status and explore ways in which the curriculum design and pedagogical decision making for schools of social work are responding to pedagogical inertia or are being responsive to the needs of the 21st century and the field.

Keywords: *Social work education; Signature pedagogy; Field education; Social work pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

A signature pedagogy is the habitual and pervasive way in which a profession teaches and socialises students in preparation for practice. The application of the term *signature pedagogy* was derived from the framework of Shulman, his paper on signature pedagogies in professions (Shulman, 2005a), and his work with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The United States' Council of Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) identify field education as the signature pedagogy for the socialisation and professionalisation of student social workers to the profession of social work (Council on Social Work Education, 2008, 2015). The CSWE adopted this position as the interactive teaching and learning process in the field where the student acquires and demonstrates the values, skills and knowledge of a social worker.

In recent years, Australian and international scholars and field educators have provided commentary on implications of the status of signature pedagogy and its relevance for social work education (Boitel & Fromm, 2014; Earls Larrison & Korr, 2013; Holden, Barker, Rosenberg, Kuppens, & Ferrell, 2011; Lyter, 2012; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). Interestingly, social work field education, in contrast to broader social work practice research, is notably one of the most under-researched areas of the profession with some arguing an absence of pedagogical and theoretical frameworks to guide practice (Earls Larrison & Korr, 2013; Holden et al., 2011; Holosko & Skinner, 2015; Miller, 2010). Within social work education, however, the field education research base is increasing. Indeed, Bogo (2015, p. 319) notes that “it is probable that *no other component* of the curriculum has been the subject of so much research, scholarly articles, and discussion of administrative issues... [and that] we are moving towards a robust *pedagogy for field education*” (original emphasis).

Despite the formalisation of signature pedagogy status in the United States, there is little research or an evidence base to make such an assertion in Australia with most published works contesting or rejecting either the validity or evidence base of this attribution to field education (Wayne et al., 2010).

The central argument for field education as signature pedagogy is related to themes of field education's centrality, importance, as a critical juncture and where the key learning for social work students occurs (Abram, Hartung, & Wernet, 2000; Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016; Homonoff, 2008). More broadly, the debate surrounding signature pedagogy and field education is positioned between whether field education meets all of Shulman's characteristics, features and qualities. There is also an argument around the effectiveness of the field education model in light of evidentiary gaps related to the model and recent socio-political influences and changes in the field and how these impact on quality of this key student socialisation and preparation for practice event. This discussion tends to highlight some reflection around congruence with the social work field education model and the emancipatory beginnings of the profession; the servitude discourse (Homonoff, 2008; Preston, George, & Silver, 2014). Of note in the debate is an alternative discourse from Earls Larrison and Korr (2013) who not only reject field education as signature pedagogy, but suggest the entire social work learning experience is signature to the profession. They explicitly reject this positioning, arguing field education did not meet “the criteria for

signature pedagogy as understood by Shulman” (Earls Larrison & Korr, 2013, p. 194) concluding social work’s signature pedagogy “occurs in all learning exchanges in our implicit and explicit curricula, and in both the classroom and the field” (Earls Larrison & Korr, 2013, p. 204).

Hence, discussion on the attribution of signature status for the profession not only seeks to examine how students are socialised and prepared for professional practice and those pervasive and central ways of teaching but may also raise insights about what impacts on and influences student learning, including how schools of social work, human services organisations and students are impacted by 21st century socio-political influences and trends.

This paper is an Australian exploration of the attribution of signature pedagogy status to field education; reflecting on how Australian field education issues and trends may be a source of illumination to the broader profession and education area. It seeks to contribute to social work’s professional reflection and critical analysis of field education and, more broadly, how social work education is faring in Australia within the broader context of current research into signature pedagogies in Australian social work education.

SIGNATURE PEDAGOGIES – WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Signature pedagogies comprise the central forms of instruction that prepare students for future professional practice. Through analysing how a profession distinctively teaches its students and ultimately prepares them for practice, much can be gleaned about social work education and therefore, the profession. Shulman highlights the nuances of professional education versus academic or knowledge based education indicating “one learns in order to engage in practice” (Shulman, 2005b, p. 1). Three interacting apprenticeships ground this professional education – a cognitive, practice and a moral apprenticeship (Shulman, 2005a).

Shulman (2005b) presents how we think about various professions and their ways of imparting key knowledge to future practitioners as a cultural exercise. There is synergy here with social work education, a socially constructed profession influenced by socio-political and normative contexts. Shulman (2005a) cites Erickson’s psychosocial theory of development as influential: that cultural understanding can be achieved by studying a culture’s nursery, reinforcing the need for research into social work education and field education. While Shulman agrees that the key ways of socialising students to the profession are found in all areas of education, he believes it is specifically the professions (nursing, social work, education, law, medicine) rather than other academic disciplines that are more likely to have a signature way of achieving this outcome. This is largely to do with the dual imperatives required from academia and the professional field. Standards are required to be upheld from two directions that may indicate a leaning towards constructive and co-constructive teaching models. This is relevant for social work as evidenced by the shared and partnership field education model where teaching, assessing and evaluating student performance in the 1,000 hours of field placement is a partnership between the academy and the field. His emphasis is on pedagogy that extends beyond mere understanding but the preparedness to act, perform and practice irrespective of whether they have enough

information (Shulman, 2005a). It becomes clear that the study of field education in social work is ultimately bound in expectations of the field and social work employers.

Shulman's commentary on inertia in signature pedagogies resonates with the broader social work education narrative where the current pedagogies, teaching and learning approaches and field education model have remained largely unchanged. Simulated learning environments and other virtual mediums provide opportunity and mechanisms for substantial change to the pedagogies (Shulman, 2005b). Shulman's proposition suggests professional reflection and research would be warranted when the environmental context experiences radical changes. In this paper, I suggest that Australian social work education and practice is experiencing radical change. Therefore, it will be in the profession's best interest to examine these changes and position social work education, in particular field education, at the forefront of social work research and innovation.

The central forms of instruction (signature pedagogy) to prepare students for the "good work" espoused by Shulman (2005a) must stand up to the standards of both academy and the profession:

They implicitly define what counts as knowledge in a field and how things become known. They define how knowledge is analysed, criticised, accepted, or discarded. They define the functions of expertise in the field, the locus of authority, and the privileges of rank and standing. (Shulman, 2005a, p. 54)

Shulman (2005a) identifies three dimensions of signature pedagogy. These are surface structure, deep structure and implicit structure. Surface structure refers to "concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing" (Shulman, 2005a, p. 54-55). Deep structure refers to "a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how" (Shulman, 2005a, pp. 54-55). Implicit structure refers to "a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about the professional attitudes, values, and dispositions" (Shulman, 2005a, p. 55). Therefore, according to the three dimensions of signature pedagogy, field education would need to be offering the profession with the ideal and preferred concrete learning opportunities based in the pedagogical practice wisdom that it is the best way to impart knowledge and skills and that the field continues to provide the implicit professional values and beliefs to prepare social workers for practice.

Considering Shulman's assertion that much can be learned about a profession by studying its signature pedagogy, examination of how social work is taught in Australia and what constitutes signature pedagogy may shed much-needed light on the broader profession of social work. Shulman's work highlights the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice and places emphasis on the purpose of education to achieve practice. This is where the signature pedagogy is integral to the professional socialisation process (Shulman, 2005a). He also emphasises the need for a signature pedagogy to not only practise the habits of the "mind" but they must also teach habits of the "heart" and "hand." With respect to the "temporal" habits and the deep structures of signature pedagogy as identified by Shulman (2005a), Cornell-Swanson (2012) asserts that much of the literature on signature pedagogy in social

work education is lacking in any reference to these features and therefore, is not comprehensive in analysis. Shulman's (2005a) three typical temporal patterns for signature pedagogy include:

- a pervasive initial pedagogy that frames and prefigures professional preparation;
- the pervasive capstone apprenticeships; and
- the sequenced and balanced portfolio of academic study, tutorials, casework practice and received knowledge orientated courses.

Of the studies that have directly looked at signature pedagogies and the social work profession, only one (Cornell-Swanson, 2012) specifically addressed the three temporal patterns for signature pedagogy. However, there was no evidence that the findings of the research were drawn from undertaking specific research into the subject, but rather the analysis seems based on practice wisdom and professional knowledge. Cornell-Swanson argues the field education or "apprenticeship" as identified above is preceded by significant pervasive pedagogy and preparation teaching "theoretical constructs, practice skills sets, and ethical codes of conduct that prepare students to think and behave like social workers" (Cornell-Swanson, 2012, p. 207). She recommends social work signature pedagogy should be comprehensive and combine "all three of the temporal patterns that define what counts in social work" (Cornell-Swanson, 2012, p. 207). It is Cornell-Swanson's view that, "although field placement is the pinnacle of the social work degree, without the first two apprenticeships of learning, the social work's signature pedagogy would be incomplete" (2012, p. 213). Earls Larrison and Korr (2013, p. 198) support this view stating signature pedagogies occur "across the curriculum and are inherent in all aspects of social work education."

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS), (AASW, 2012) set the criteria for the accreditation of each social work course in Australia and guide the development of social work education, curriculum content, field education standards, governance for programs and general organisational requirements. Curriculum statements in the standards include direction on core content (explicit curriculum) such as mental health, child wellbeing and protection, cross-cultural practice, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and skills, and the various values, levels of knowledge, skills and methods required to undertake social work practice as a graduate (AASW, 2012). Despite articulation of the knowledge, skills, and values that are required to be delivered in each social work program, there is limited guidance on how social work is to be taught by academic units. Section 4.3 of the standards outlines four educational philosophies that must be articulated; adult learning principles, education that fosters lifelong learning, mutual learning by student and education and finally, that social work education requires the integration of theory to practice (AASW, 2012). There is reference to pedagogy in the overall principles for social work education section:

Use of contemporary pedagogical knowledge and the associated processes of learning are requirements for developing core attributes and for building students' commitment to, and an identity with, professional social work. It is recognised that tensions exist between learning processes and requirements for content, and that there is a point at which the amount of content will compromise the processes of learning and the development of social work graduates as critically reflective professional practitioners. These standards strive for the appropriate balance. (AASW, 2012, p. 9)

While the ASWEAS provides an overview of the expected graduate attributes and broad reference to curriculum, pedagogic discussion or standard is distinctly lacking in the document. How schools of social work can achieve this balance has been questioned. Pedagogy encompasses “both the act of teaching and its contingent theories and debates” (Alexander, 2009, p. 13). In the absence of explicit direction or research, social work academics and education units may have to rely on broader scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) publications, social work pedagogy research, practice wisdom and experience gained from teaching social workers to inform the selected methods, tasks, activities, interactions, structure and forum utilised as part of pedagogical frameworks.

According to section 2.2 of the CSWE's 2015 standards, signature pedagogy refers to the “elements of instruction and of socialization that teach future practitioners the fundamental dimensions of professional work in their discipline – to think, to perform, and to act ethically and with integrity. Field education is the signature pedagogy for social work” (CSWE, 2015 p. 12).

The signature declaration has remained in place since the 2008 education standards until the most recent 2015 EPAS. The EPAS relies on a competency-based educational framework with nine social work competencies curriculum features, mission and goals and an explicit curriculum inclusive of field education, implicit curriculum and assessment (CSWE, 2015).

The notion that field education is signature pedagogy for the profession has been criticised and debated by social work academics and the field. Key to many of the arguments directed towards signature status is the view that field education is highly experiential; the student is involved with real experiences of performing the helping role combined with reflection and conceptualisation of the practice situation (Wayne et al., 2010). As a consequence of connecting experiential learning to signature pedagogy, it has conversely been argued that alternative structures and pedagogical techniques for successful student learning do not necessarily have to be in the field and can be achieved through observation and listening to case examples, reading process recordings, reports and other indirect experiences. An example of this is de Warren and Mensinga's (2004) presentation of a pedagogy of social work education informed by problem-based learning and deployment of many of the processes of learning used traditionally in field education such as case-based learning, reflexivity, and supported, self-directed learning (2004).

Both 2008 and 2015 CSWE standards have highlighted equal importance placed on the “field” and the “classroom” in developing the social work skills and knowledge and

integration of theory to practice. While the new standards indicated equality, they have also noted field education as being *the* signature pedagogy for the education of students in social work (CSWE, 2015). The literature indicates this signature pedagogy status came directly after Shulman's work on signature pedagogies in various professions not inclusive of social work, rather than coming from research or enterprise in the social work field specifically. This raises the question of validity of the attribution and the motivation for applying the status. After the initial attribution was made by the CSWE in 2008 (CSWE, 2008), several authors sought to respond to this new development supporting or more rarely, questioning the signature pedagogy status attributed to field education (Holden et al., 2011; Holosko & Skinner, 2015; Morley & Dunstan, 2013; Wayne et al., 2010).

Despite the discipline-based dialogue, there is limited research applying all, or even some, of the framework and components as discussed by Shulman. There have been some studies on effectiveness of field education and the resulting centrality of place in social work education including Holden's systematic review where he was particularly interested in whether there was "evidence" for the position (Holden et al., 2011, p. 364). Holden argued that scholars stating field education is integral, important, central, indispensable, most significant and most powerful learning experience in social work is a form of evidence but not, according to Rubin (Rubin & Babbie, 2016), evidence of effectiveness. Furthermore, he considered the general themes from the literature that field education is important enough for the attribution of signature pedagogy but there is limited research on it (Holden et al., 2011). Outside of a small number of papers on the subject, the assumption of centrality or signature status has been the subject of limited professional reflection or critical analysis. Holden et al. (2011) assert that there is no evidence of effectiveness of field instruction in social work in the United States and furthermore suggests this is an under-researched area.

Perhaps the result is related to social work's preference for qualitative research or perhaps the result related to, as Holden ponders, social work's "low regard with which educational research seems to be held in the academy" (Holden et al., 2011 p. 369). However, signature pedagogy status is not only about the effectiveness of a model or approach, but rather the range of qualities and standards expected from a central form of imparting knowledge and skills and socialisation to a profession.

While there has been some focus on existing research on signature pedagogy and field education generally, more attention has been given to the social work practice context, impacts of the field education model on students and universities and how field education can support welfare and social service resource gaps and limitations. This narrative has been extended by Rosenman specifically arguing universities are under pressure from the ideological orientations of the federal government and that there is a growth in the user pay approach to higher education (Rosenman, 2007). While similar programs such as nursing and teaching have been identified as a "national priority" this is not the case for social work which she argues results in funding for the management of field education remaining limited and not properly recognised (Rosenman, 2007).

A research focus on social work education, specifically field education, may provide the profession with much-needed insight to the current status of the profession and in so

doing, offer a platform for strategic vision about the future for social work. As Pease and Fook (1999) note, often the prevailing view remains constant, as there is no knowledge of alternative views.

CONCLUSION

While the CSWE has attributed signature pedagogy to social work field education, there has been limited research where Shulman's framework has been applied in its entirety. Importantly, Shulman's characterisation of signature pedagogy includes an emphasis on a range of scaffolded learning that occurs in conjunction with or before (in the apprenticeships) the signature pedagogy is implemented. While field placement may be the capstone of the social work degree, it is clear that, without the preceding apprenticeships of learning, a balance between the field and curriculum content with some perhaps consistent and agreed-upon distinctive social work pedagogy, the signature pedagogy is not complete. This suggests only part of the social work story is illuminated by field education research. The symbiotic relationship between the academy and the field, while important, is also only part of the story. Social work education research, together with clearly defined pedagogical standards may be necessary for the profession's next decade of growth. Further research and radical action may be required to identify how social work educators understand and apply the signature pedagogy of field education to teaching and learning and explore the relevance, connection to, and suitability of, field education as signature for the profession.

References

- AASW. (2012). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards* (ASWEAS) (p. 9). Canberra, ACT: Author.
- Abram, F., Hartung, M., & Wernet, S. (2000). The Non MSW task supervisor, MSW field instructor, and the practicum student. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 20*(1–2), 171–185.
- Alexander, R. (2009). Pedagogy, culture and the power of comparison. In H. L. Daniels, & J. Porter, (Eds.), *Educational theories, cultures and learning: A critical perspective* (pp. 10 - 26). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical social work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 43*(3), 317–324.
- Boitel, C. R., & Fromm, L. R. (2014). Defining signature pedagogy in social work education: Learning theory and the learning contract. *Journal of Social Work Education, 50*(4), 608–622.
- Cornell-Swanson, L. J. (2012). Toward a comprehensive signature pedagogy in social work education. In R. A. R. Gurung (Ed.), *Exploring more signature pedagogies: Approaches to teaching disciplinary habits of mind* (pp. 203–216). Sterling, UK: Stylus Publishing.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Retrieved from [https://cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2008EPAS/2008EDUCATIONALPOLICYANDACCREDITATIONSTANDARDS\(EPAS\)-08-24-2012.pdf.aspx](https://cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2008EPAS/2008EDUCATIONALPOLICYANDACCREDITATIONSTANDARDS(EPAS)-08-24-2012.pdf.aspx)
- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Educational policy and accreditation standards for baccalaureate and master's social work programs*. Retrieved from <http://wwwhttp://www.cswe.org/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2015-EPAS/2015EPA>
- de Warren, D., & Mensinga, J. T. (2004). Innovative social work education across distance: Community focused learning. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education, 6*(1), 46–63.
- Earls Larrison, T., & Korr, W. S. (2013). Does social work have a signature pedagogy? *Journal of Social Work Education, 49*(2), 194–206.
- Hemy, M., Boddy, J., Chee, P., & Sauvage, D. (2016). Social work students juggling" field placement. *Social Work Education, 35*(2), 215-228.

- Holden, G., Barker, K., Rosenberg, G., Kuppens, S., & Ferrell, L. W. (2011). The signature pedagogy of social work? An investigation of the evidence. *Research on Social Work Practice, 21*(3), 363–372.
- Holosko, M., & Skinner, J. (2015). A call for field coordination leadership to implement the signature pedagogy. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 25*(3), 275–283. doi:10.1080/10911359.2015.1005519
- Homonoff, E. (2008). The heart of social work: Best practitioners rise to challenges in field instruction. *The Clinical Supervisor, 27*(2), 135–169.
- Lyter, S. C. (2012). Potential of field education as signature pedagogy: The field director role. *Journal of Social Work Education, 48*(1), 179–188.
- Miller, S. E. (2010). A conceptual framework for the professional socialization of social workers. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 20*(7), 924–938. doi:10.1080/10911351003751934
- Morley, C., & Dunstan, J. (2013). Critical reflection: A response to neoliberal challenges to field education? *Social Work Education, 32*(2), 141–156. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.730141
- Pease, B., Fook, J. (1999). *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Preston, S., George, P., & Silver, P. (2014). Field education in social work: The need for reimagining. *Critical Social Work, 15*(1), 57–67. Retrieved from http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/system/files/Preston_George_Silver_2014.pdf
- Rosenman, L. (2007). Social work education, the university, and the state. *Australian Social Work, 60*(1), 5–17. doi:10.1080/03124070601166679
- Rubin, A., & Babbie, E. (2016). *Essential research methods for social work*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Shulman, L. (2005a). Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Daedalus, Summer 134*(3), 52–59.
- Shulman, L. (2005b). Pedagogies of uncertainty. *Liberal Education, 91*(2), 18–25.
- Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2010). Field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 46*(3), 327–339.

Bringing Business, Community and University into Partnership: Innovation in Field Education

Louise Harms, Kate Naish, Jane Stanley, Nicole Hill, Hayden Raysmith, Jan Thomas and Adrian Butera

Louise Harms, PhD, The University of Melbourne

Kate Nash, The University of Melbourne

Jane Stanley, cohealth, Victoria

Nicole Hill, PhD, The University of Melbourne

Hayden Raysmith, Hobson Bay Community Fund, Williamstown

Jan Thomas, The University of Melbourne

Adrian Butera, Hobson Bay Community Fund, Williamstown

Address for Correspondence:

louisekh@unimelb.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In the current Australian context, social work field educators face a two-fold challenge – an increased demand for supervised field education placements, given the growth of social work programs and the student numbers within them, and a diminishing capacity for agencies to provide them. Innovative responses are needed to ensure that, not only are placements provided, but that they are of a high quality in terms of learning opportunities for students. This article describes an approach to field education that brought business, the community and the University into a new partnership. A new placement model initiated by our Faculty's Engagement Team was developed in collaboration with the Department of Social Work, a philanthropic group (the Hobsons Bay Community Fund), business groups and two local councils. This less-familiar territory of private sector collaboration enabled students to develop their social work skills in unanticipated ways. This article highlights the ways in which an innovative practice model and learning opportunities have provided insights into engagement in new areas of partnership.

Keywords: *Field education; Community; Private sector; philanthropy; social work students*

INTRODUCTION

More than ten years ago, the call was made for radical change in social work field education. Wayne, Raskin, and Bogo (2006) highlighted the constraints of the agency-centred 20th century model of field education, which included a lack of appreciation of dramatically changing agency, educational institution and student bodies. Ongoing fiscal constraints on agencies and universities, the competing demands of research and teaching in academia alongside pressures to increase student load (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Karger, 2012), and the social and economic pressures affecting students (Nagy & Burch, 2009; Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Teigiser, 2009) have continued to pose significant challenges to the delivery of social work field education in the Australian context. This article reflects on the opportunities that emerged through a shared and flexible approach to building new agency and educational institutional partnerships, enabling a locally situated, enquiry-oriented and action-focused community to form (Morley, 2016; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Our experience suggests that flexibility and coordination of interests may provide some answers to current challenges. This field education model brought together collaborators within the University to work with philanthropic, business and local government partners in ways that saw collaborators take on atypical and unexpected roles. It combined elements of community of practice (CoP) and problem based learning (PBL), and enabled students to engage in an innovative learning experience.

Origins of Partnership

From a chance conversation between a Hobsons Bay Community Fund (HBCF) member and local businessman, and the Senior Director of Engagement at the University of Melbourne Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS), a new placement model was proposed. It was developed and trialled in 2016. Specifically, it enabled an existing relationship between the Faculty of MDHS and its Department of Social Work to extend into partnerships with a philanthropic community fund, two local government councils, and a real estate business in the Western suburbs of Melbourne.

Negotiations to establish the partnership were shared by the Faculty, minimising demands on the Department of Social Work's Field Education Director. Faculty engagement staff took advice from a cross-disciplinary Academic Advisory Group in which senior social work and other academic staff participated. For the Faculty, this increased the chance that a successful partnership would be brokered between the agency and one or more of its schools and departments. The process ensured agency needs were fully explored in a way that reduced the demands on social work academics, although they guided the process. The proposal for partnership reflected knowledge and recognition by the Faculty of what a department of social work could offer and confidence that this offering fitted the needs of the agency. It progressed because it tapped into the reciprocal interests of the agency, community, Faculty and Department of Social Work, and importantly, the learning needs of students.

Coordination of Interests

For the Department of Social Work, it meant that, despite a very large, multidisciplinary Faculty context, the relatively small discipline of social work, with its unique strengths, was visible and fully engaged. The partnership made it possible to offer a group of students a

community-development-oriented placement. This was an imperative for both students and staff in and of itself, but the need was further compounded by the increasing costs of alternative placements, particularly those in the health sector.

For the Faculty, with an explicit strategy and commitment to PBL and active involvement in the western suburbs of Melbourne, it offered new possibilities for embedding teaching, learning and research in this community. It also presented an opportunity to expand the Faculty's engagement approach into community-centred work with the philanthropic sector and civil society more broadly. The Department and the Faculty had aligned goals in advancing the discipline of social work and its role in workforce development, but both also perceived additional opportunities through partnership.

Similarly, there was strong recognition from the outset by the philanthropic community fund of what the Department of Social Work, in particular, and academia, in general, could contribute towards improvement in child and youth health. HBCF made a commitment to invest \$10,000 and volunteer support each year for three years. The Faculty committed to providing a project manager and the structured involvement of Master of Social Work students for three years, and \$10,000 each year for two years. Both bodies would bring the knowledge, networks, goodwill and support from their backgrounds: all important assets that are often undervalued. The recognition of a specific set of problems that the collaborators could mutually address helped to establish the business case (necessary but not sufficient) for each to participate.

Motivational Incentives

At the time the partnership was formed, local government councils were preparing to develop new four-year council plans. They were reviewing key policies such as their "Disability Access and Inclusion Strategies"; "Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans"; and "Early Years Plans." Partners also recognised that major changes and opportunities would come into play with the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2018, bringing considerable uncertainty into future directions. Staff of the University and the philanthropic community fund saw the opportunity to contribute to policy directions, community cohesion and social capital. The local councils saw the opportunity the partnership presented to increase the resources, expertise and diversity of actors that could contribute to policy and service development processes and community networks. Although the project was to be conducted over three years, parties agreed to plan one year at a time and to continue to shape the project by the research and findings at each stage, and respond to local context. Therefore, flexibility was a contributing factor to the stability of the partnership.

Influences on the Placement Model

Common contemporary conditions and constraints in academia and agencies, described by Wayne et al. (2006), Teigiser (2009) and Nagy and Birch (2009), were important drivers in developing a new model of field education. These elements contributed to a CoP model of cooperation that suited the mutual objectives, shared values, and complementarity of skills of the participants. It also suited the situated nature of the issues the partners wanted to address (Fox, 2000).

PBL has been used in medicine and a range of other health disciplines for many years, and has gained international acceptance as an educational model (Lam, 2004). More recently, Lam (2004) has proposed PBL as a means of integrating theory and field education in social work. This, together with the desire to foster teamwork and adaptable knowledge application, influenced the model.

The Student Experience

Six students from the first and second year of the Master of Social Work were allocated to the placement, each from a diverse range of backgrounds and experience, including three who lived in the local project areas. The placement focused specifically on a social inclusion project for young people. It examined the ways in which greater access to sports and recreational opportunities could be fostered for young people in the local community. Members of the partnership met with the students to discuss perspectives on local issues and assist them to negotiate scope and resources for their project. The placement model involved these students being physically based in a non-traditional setting – at a real estate business located in the local government area. Students had their own rooms and use of facilities, provided pro bono by the director of the business. From this location, they researched the local demographics, services, policies, and made arrangements to meet with local residents, advocates and professionals working in the region. Their activities included co-exploration of local issues, negotiation of objectives and methods with a range of stakeholders, policy analysis, demographic research, interviewing (parents, volunteers and professionals), qualitative analysis, development of a theory of change, report writing, strategic advice, and presenting to meetings. Ultimately, the students' role was to advise HBCF on how to spend their \$10,000 investment in the local community to increase social inclusion.

Students were supervised by a qualified social worker from the field education team at the University of Melbourne's Department of Social Work. Individual supervision was provided to each student once a week, along with additional group supervision, by this same social worker. Task supervision was provided 1–2 days per week, with email and phone support as needed, by the project manager from the Faculty's Engagement Team. Mentoring and additional project support and direction was provided by the chair of the HBCF, who brought extensive knowledge from a distinguished career in public, community and philanthropic sectors, and who is himself a University of Melbourne Social Work alumnus. This alumnus provided an important role in helping students translate their classroom learning to the practice situation through group sessions that reflected on the application of theory. A single University practice teacher was assigned to the six students for liaison and assessment. The supervision and assessment was paid for by the investment of the Faculty Engagement Office, enabling the partnership to become established before determining the longer-term sustainability of the placement arrangement.

The Learning Model: Blending PBL and CoP

Within this model, students were encouraged to take a high level of initiative in the project and their work, while having a high level of support from experienced practitioners, in the form of facilitated exploration and modelling.

The learning conformed to the PBL model in that it was student-centred, small-group-based, teachers were facilitators, real-life problems were the stimulus for learning, and new insights were derived by self-directed learning (Lam, 2009). It was also a version of a CoP in that the students were engaged in a situated learning activity with a defined domain, community and practice, in which participants negotiated purpose, identity, and learning in collaboration (Nagy & Birch, 2009). Outcomes were not defined in advance – a situation that was surprising to the students. Where this placement model differed from a traditional CoP was in the sequence of learning development, which largely skipped over legitimate, peripheral participation for the students (though this was possible for co-located staff in the local business).

This project between the Hobsons Bay Community Fund and the University of Melbourne saw the students – as individuals and as a group – possessing from the outset the capacity to contribute valuable work and relevant leadership skills. The placement model positioned them in the role of co-collaborators, engaged in learning-by-doing. While they were supported with social work supervision, task supervision, and other opportunities for professional input, they were also tasked with the role of shaping the project and to participate in the process of negotiation with community stakeholders about the directions it would take. While this initially sat uncomfortably for the group, who were expecting to be more closely directed in their work, particularly in the early stages, the students, individually and as a group, met these learning outcomes. Yandel and Turvey (2007) advocate stages of peripheral participation before assuming full responsibility but, in this case, the partners wanted to acknowledge existing skills and support rapid full participation. This approach would not have been advisable without the partners' commitment to student learning and active encouragement of their efforts.

Learning Outcomes

Under the model, the students met the learning requirements of their field education curriculum and their learning goals. At the same time, they produced evidence-informed advice (through written and verbal presentations) for the Hobsons Bay Community Fund and local councils, which was accepted as the foundation for planning the next steps in the project and allocation of resources. In addition, they rapidly developed and honed a range of communication, leadership and project skills, including group and team work, task management and stakeholder engagement. Although further research is needed to establish the effectiveness of the model, the apparent combination of educational value, student satisfaction and situated usefulness is promising.

Drawing on descriptive evaluation mechanisms (journaling and survey responses) built into the placement experience, learning challenges and opportunities were evident. For the students, the challenges of a placement demanding an active role in leadership from the students themselves were combined with the notable influence they were able to exert in the project's direction. For example, one student noted:

I thought there would be more work done by HBCF members and councils, and we would be there to assist them. However, I liked having more independence and was surprised by how much our ideas and research meant to the HBCF.

The non-traditional setting provided further challenges for the students. They had to actively make links with mentors and community organisations, rather than having these in their immediate placement setting to directly observe. They also had to structure their own time and coordinate their own group work, especially on the days they did not have formal supervision or task management, which required active organisation and mature management of group dynamics.

Significant opportunities for learning emerged in this context. As two students noted, they were able to recognise the transferability of skills they learnt into non-traditional =social work contexts:

Seeing how social work values and strategies can operate through the private sector and commercial endeavours.

And:

Being able to work effectively within a team environment, communicating appropriately and effectively with all members, undertaking, delegating and monitoring tasks, motivating each other and responding effectively as a team to challenges and setbacks are all essential skills that have been a focus of this placement, and are directly transferable to any work setting that involves teamwork, or working with fellow colleagues.

Another clearly articulated the skills they acquired in working with this uncertainty:

My experience in a project management role and the time management, organisational and communication skills involved with this will also come into play in any work setting where I need to manage my own or others' work, and particularly should I ever take on a leadership role. Being able to manage and respond to uncertainty is also a very important skill, as regardless of the work setting, there will always be some uncertainty and lack of control present, regardless of how structured and directive the environment is. This has taught me that uncertainty is not always a negative thing, but is an opportunity to challenge myself and test my ability to anticipate and prepare for a range of different outcomes or setbacks, and respond flexibly to this.

The partnerships involved in the placement model provided new opportunities for learning about macro-contexts of practice engagement:

I was surprised about the "inner mechanisms" of community development, particularly the role of local businesses in supporting community development projects and ventures. Prior to this placement, I would have believed community development to be solely the domain of local government and not-for-profits. These relationships between businesses and other bodies involved in community development are strengthened by mutual interest and shared values. I was able to witness some of the "rapport building" between bodies, which highlighted to me the need for strong horizontal and vertical linkages.

The project had a range of outcomes, both anticipated and unanticipated. It was uncertain at the outset whether the placement model and the partnership underpinning its

development would be a success. One of the difficulties with CoPs is that engagement and results are not guaranteed (Nagy & Birch, 2009), but in this case, the partners' willingness to proceed with full commitment in the face of uncertainty appears to have contributed to success and satisfaction of partners and thus to have built momentum. A significant effect of the student work was a commitment by all parties to continue into the next year with clearly identified priorities for action based closely on the students' recommendations.

Outputs of the project included a theoretically grounded, written strategy for change – against which to monitor progress towards community objectives – and evidence-informed recommendations for action and resource allocation, based on local consultation. Families, local sporting clubs, peak sporting bodies, council members and advocates were involved in the conversation about what inclusion could, or should, look like. For the local councils and HBCF especially, this was a welcome result.

For the students, there were unexpected outcomes: an ability to see that they could affect wider systems change in their roles as social workers; recognition of their acquisition of leadership, teamwork and project management skills; and their unique exposure to the contribution of business to community work. This challenged their perceived separation of community services from the broader business sector.

Importantly, student learning had broader value to the community because it was embedded in productive activity with significance as a social contribution. The Chair of the HBCF noted that:

The Hobsons Bay Community Fund has been successful because it is underpinned by a very strong volunteer ethic of giving back to the community. Council has contributed, local business has contributed, service clubs have contributed, and the people on the committee give a great deal of time and work for the fund and nobody is paid so every dollar into the fund goes to community benefit ... So it is about building relationships and highlighting the good work that is being done by a broad cross-section of organisations in the community.

He noted that it is, in fact, real engagement with the community that enables real influence and impact and that this is a powerful learning experience:

What is significant about the partnership between Melbourne University and the Hobsons Bay Community Fund is the way in which it creates a real opportunity for engagement with community networks that influence the allocation of resources, policy decisions, and enable students to engage with a broad cross-section of interest groups, powerbrokers, and decision makers in a placement that is not just artificially creating the opportunity to influence decisions and resources, but a very real one.

Arguably, the value of the “realness” of the learning experience in this case is more significant than the broadly acknowledged benefits of PBL (Lam, 2009). This benefit is likely to be directly related to the CoP elements of the placement: the situated, specific, negotiated nature of the shared endeavour. Without this negotiated form of power relationships and sufficient diversity of skills and perspectives to contribute to problem solving, CoPs are less reliable in having positive impacts (Fox, 2000).

Further benefits of CoP elements in the model are suggested by the comments of the business owner at whose premises the students were physically located. The value of legitimate peripheral participation is illustrated by his observation that his staff:

... are involved in the community in multiple ways... [the staff] enjoyed getting to know the students and they were excited by what they were getting involved in, what the students were getting involved in. So they were indirectly a part of it. That was never an objective. We never thought that was going to be a part of the outcome in any way, shape or form, and whilst it might only be a small part of the outcome, it's a really powerful one at a business level.

Broader Implications

The full assessment of the value of the model will only be possible in the next few years. At this point in time, critical features in the success of the model include the establishment of strong, trusting relationships between all partners, and a commitment to this continuing for a minimum of three years. They also include the active involvement in, and commitment to, student learning by all partners, with the recognition that students and communities can be mutually beneficial resources for each other. Importantly, each partner provided regular educational support for students throughout the placement, without which it is doubtful the community would have gained the same benefit. Financial investment was also a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in the success of the model because it enabled the placement to proceed, but the success of the model appears to have owed much to the sharing of values, goodwill and networks. These ingredients of success are not unusual, but the actors involved all played atypical roles, showing that a flexible arrangement can make a difference.

As noted in the community development literature (DeFilippis & Saegart, 2012), a key driver of success in this model was the mentoring and inspiration provided to the students by the senior leadership of each partner organisation, and the investment by local business in the project. Together, these elements provided students with the opportunity to be active participants, and to develop real influence, and real networks, in a process of community change. Enquiry-based and action-oriented, situated learning thus produced excellent learning opportunities that were just as valuable for other reasons than field education, and from other perspectives.

Situated PBL across the Faculty's disciplines may provide synergistic benefits to multiple fields of study and training, and for multiple communities of place and interest. The skills of teamwork, organisation, leadership and local knowledge, together with the asset development of relationships and networks, may add value to graduate education that other learning models do not provide to the same extent. Longitudinal research designed to explore these effects would be worthwhile.

Expansion of this type of learning model may increase the opportunities of community organisations, businesses, services and graduates to engage in inter-disciplinary and inter-sectoral professional cooperation and learning, with potential benefits in the capacity for collaboration and the speed and creativity of problem-solving. This type of model is resource-intensive, however, and requires a high level of commitment in a context of uncertain outcomes. Planning for graduate training and local workforce development

could take these considerations into account. While individual contexts will determine the feasibility of the approach, the use of education as a contributing resource to local problem-solving using this model is suggestive of opportunities to explore new or different ways to mobilise local and institutional resources.

Many businesses have community links, and actively embrace a philosophy of corporate social responsibility. So a key challenge for social work is therefore to tap into this commitment and seek replication in other contexts. Such an investment raises the question as to how social work as a discipline can engage within its own faculty or university context to work in partnership, and seek to expand into the philanthropic and business sectors for placement opportunities (Lee, 2016). Many other businesses may well have the capacity and facilities to host students in a similar model. Flexible, partnered problem-solving to pursue common purposes in ways that recognise the value students can offer may present new ways to address educational challenges and resource constraints and would take social work placements into new contexts, beyond some of the constraints of 20th century models.

References

- DeFilippis, J., & Saegert, S. (Eds.). (2012). *The community development reader* (2nd ed.). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Fox, S. (2000). Communities of practice, Foucault and actor network theory. *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(6), 853–867.
- Gursansky, D., & Le Sueur, E. (2012). Conceptualising field education in the twenty-first century: Contradiction, challenges and opportunities. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 31(7), 914–931.
- Karger, H. (2012). Lessons from American social work education: Caution ahead. *Australian Social Work*, 65(3), 311–325.
- Lam, D. (2009). Problem-based learning: An integration of theory and field. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(3), 371–389.
- Lee, W. (2016). Social work-business sector collaboration in pursuit of economic justice. *Social Work*, 61(3), 209–216.
- Morley, D. (2016). Big ideas: Applying Wenger's communities of practice theory to placement learning. *Nurse Education Today*, 39, 161–162. doi:10.1016/j.nedt.2016.02.007
- Nagy, J., & Burch, T. (2009). Communities of practice in academe (CoP-iA): Understanding academic work practices to enable knowledge building capacities in corporate universities. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(2), 227–247.
- Teigiser, K. S. (2009). Field note: New approaches to generalist field education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45(1), 139–146.
- Wayne, J., Raskin, M., & Bogo, M. (2006). Field notes: The need for radical change in field education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 42(1), 161–169.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Yandell, J., & Turvey, A. (2007). Standards or communities of practice? Competing models of workplace learning and development. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(4), 533–550.

Leadership and Social Work Education in the Online Environment

Beth R. Crisp, PhD

Beth Crisp, PhD, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Geelong

Address for Correspondence:

beth.crisp@deakin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Australian universities have been offering qualifying degrees in social work to students at a distance for almost three decades. While proponents have argued that this has increased access to higher education, there remains strong opposition within sections of the social work community. Reflecting on her experiences of providing social work education at a distance over the past two decades, the author argues that some of the critiques offered are based on outdated understandings as to what distance education can be, particularly utilising online technologies. It is also noted that many traditional on-campus programs are introducing online technologies into their teaching, and that previous distinctions between distance education and on-campus education are increasingly blurred. Rather than accepting the suggestion that leadership in social work education means actively proscribing online learning, particularly in the area of teaching interpersonal skills, it is proposed that leadership in social work education involves ensuring learning outcomes are not compromised and that graduates are prepared for practice in the digital era.

Keywords: *Social work education; Online education; Distance education; Pedagogy; Accreditation standards; Australia*

BACKGROUND

Social work education commenced in Australia in Melbourne and Sydney in 1929 (Martin, 1983) and, by the mid-1970s, there were 13 programs, almost all based in state capitals (Puckett & Jones, 1979). By the late 1980s and, with no new programs established, the need to broaden the reach for social work education was recognised. Some universities received funding to run social work programs in regional cities for cohorts of students. However, these were short-term programs, typically with a local coordinator and fly-in/fly-out staff, who would visit a remote site. While such programs established a demand for social work education in rural communities, the sustainability of the model was limited (Condliffe, 1991).

The 1990s not only saw the emergence of several new schools of social work, but also establishment of a number of programs that sought to provide a professional social work education, primarily using distance education methods which enabled students to undertake much of their learning using materials delivered to their home with relatively minimal requirements for on-campus attendance (Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). As distance education had been well established in higher education in Australia since the 1970s (Stacey, 2005), it could not be said that social work was an early adopter. Furthermore, despite several universities having considerable expertise in providing a range of courses to students at a distance, there was much scepticism, if not outright hostility, within the social work community, to the idea that social work could be taught to students at a distance (Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). Many of the submissions made to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) in its 2016 review of the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (ASWEAS) were firmly of the view that social work must be taught face to face (AASW, 2016). As a long-standing member, and former member of the executive of the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (ACHSSW), from my perspective the issue of whether, and if so how much, time distance students should spend on campus has arguably been the most divisive issue amongst members of the council in recent years. In the ACHSSW's own submission to the ASWEAS review (ACHSSW, 2016), one member university not only declined to endorse the council's proposal which called for no change to the attendance requirements for distance students but proposed that on-campus attendance requirements should be increased from a minimum of 20 to 30 days (University of Queensland Social Work Program, 2016).

As someone who has been involved in distance education since the mid-1990s, I am acutely aware that, for both students and educators, distance education today is only faintly recognisable to those early efforts two decades ago. Distance students in the 1990s would typically receive printed course materials at the commencement of a semester, and be required to post their assignments to the university by the due date. Print materials were supplemented for some units by the inclusion of audio and video tapes, and requirements that students attend campus for a number of days, particularly for the teaching of skills units. My own university used to spend considerable sums on producing learning materials which had the production quality of commercial textbooks, but then expected these to be used for multiple years without being revised. In addition to these textbook-quality study guides, students might also receive bound volumes of readings, as well as being able to request the university library to post them further books and articles as they required.

Looking back, I recognise that the print materials were a decidedly static medium, and as such provided justification for those who critically argue that social work education must be highly interactive. However, while distance education has changed immensely over the last two decades, many of the criticisms seem out of touch with current practices and underestimate the possibilities that have enabled distance education to respond to the need for interactivity (see also Maidment, 2005).

From Distance Education to Online Education

As possibilities for online connectivity evolved, distance education (which frequently required students to attend a physical classroom in their own locality), involved transmitting lectures from one site to another, sometimes with the capability of students at multiple sites being able to ask questions of the lecturer. While potentially more interactive than print, poor connections and limited available time meant that many students remained little more than observers (Horvath & Mills, 2011). Hence, when discussing online education, I am referring to programs that not only provide content online but also utilise “Web 2.0 interactive technology to engage students in learning activities that enable users to create and share information with each other and interact in real time” (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017, p. 209) from wherever they have an internet connection.

Although initially developed in 1995 as a way of distributing content online (University of British Columbia, 2004), it was not until the early years of the 21st century that online learning management systems such as Blackboard, Moodle and Desire 2 Learn, sometimes renamed by learning institutions with their own moniker (Vernon, Vakalahi, Pierce, Pittman-Munke, & Adkins, 2009) became commonplace in Australian universities. When I arrived in my current university in 2005, the social work program remained primarily as a print-based course, with relatively minimal use of the learning management systems. The development of web conferencing software such as Blackboard Collaborate (previously known as Elluminate Live) (Blackboard, 2017), along with increased access to the internet by Australian households (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and increasing speeds to download and upload materials (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) have combined to enable online social work education to realise possibilities far beyond what my colleagues and I had considered possible even a decade ago. Online students in my university now have access to online synchronous tutorials in which they can speak both with staff and other students in a live forum. Also, only a few years ago, most of our students had insufficient bandwidth to upload a video of themselves engaged in a roleplay, but now students do this routinely and provide feedback to each other on their work (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017).

While distance education providers clearly had potential for making distance education much more interactive, many campus-based learning programs also began experimenting with online learning management systems, adding functionality over time (Ayala, 2009). It is not uncommon for campus-based students to now find basic information about their courses including seminar guides and information about assessment tasks online rather than in handouts provided in class. Discussion boards enable students to ask questions of each other and of staff at any time in the week, and not just in class. In terms of assessments, online submission of assignments has proved beneficial to both students and staff who may not be on campus on the due date for submission, and disputes as to the exact time an

assignment was submitted have almost disappeared. The use of software to screen written assignments for plagiarism, such as Turnitin (Turnitin, 2017) is now routine in many institutions, and can be set to run automatically when students submit work for assessment.

Campus-based students in many institutions now expect to find additional teaching materials online such as copies of their lecture notes or Powerpoint™ slides, or links to readings, podcasts and other materials (Zuber, 2016). As libraries are increasingly subscribing to online rather than print journals, and purchasing online copies of books, online links to readings are frequently provided to students. Online technologies have enabled teaching staff to move beyond reading matter in their provision of materials to students with many putting up recordings of their lectures (Wivell & Day, 2015). In my university, recording of lectures and linking them to the online learning systems has become automated. For students juggling work, family and other commitments, there may be little incentive to attend classes which they can now watch in a time and place of their own choosing. Given the findings of a recent survey of Australian social work students which found 34% reporting that they skip classes due to the need to attend paid work (James Cook University & Australian Association of Social Workers, 2016), the availability of some online classes is also proving crucial to many supposedly *on-campus* students. My own experience is that user tracking facilities which are part of online learning platforms do, in fact, provide the evidence that many students not physically present are nevertheless accessing some classroom teaching. Indeed a study of online participation in group activities conducted in two Australian universities found that most students not only completed tasks which had been set for them, but many exceeded the course requirements concerning their participation (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017).

Lecturing tends to result in passive classroom learning experiences, so if lectures can be delivered as effectively online, then classroom time can be used for more interactive learning activities (Moulding, 2010). Hence, pedagogical models such as the “flipped classroom” (Zuber, 2016) are being advocated as an effective way of using online technologies to enhance classroom learning. Other ways in which technology is being used to enhance campus-based teaching include online systems for providing feedback for presentations or role plays, simulations which have online components (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017), and study skills programs which enable students to test their learning in private before being required to demonstrate their learning in the more public space which is the classroom (Smart Sparrow, 2017).

Just as online technologies have resulted in major changes in campus-based teaching, there have also been major changes in distance education (Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). Rather than receiving a pack of information which has been mailed prior to the commencement of a semester, input can be provided regularly. Conferencing software allows for real-time seminars with students speaking with each other and the teaching staff much as they would in a classroom on campus. Discussion boards also encourage vigorous debate among the student cohort. As on a physical campus, students may engage in discussions and debates when teaching staff are present, or do so without staff participation. Pedagogies involving group work (Wivell & Day, 2015) and problem-based learning (Wheeler, 2006), once thought of as only possible for campus-based students, are just some of the many possibilities which online educators utilise.

Contemporary Practice

In 2017, it does not seem sensible to be debating whether social work education should exist in the online environment. It would be surprising if there was any Australian social work program which did not use online technologies in some way in the delivery or administration of educational programs. Typically, some use of an online learning environment is mandated by university administrations and not something social work program directors have any say about.

Rather than a dichotomy between on-campus and distance education providers, we now have a continuum in which providers vary in their use of online technologies from very limited to extensive content being offered online. While the current terminology of “blended learning” (Ayala, 2009; Wivell & Day, 2015) is itself not unproblematic, it is perhaps a more realistic descriptor than the dichotomous campus-located versus off-campus or online learning descriptors currently recognised by the AASW in its accreditation of Australian social work degrees (AASW, 2012).

Within social work education, the requirement that learning activities, including assessment tasks, should be both relevant and authentic to what students will experience in professional practice is widely accepted (Thomas & Quinney, 2011). This includes the learning context as academic staff from one online provider of social work education noted more than a decade ago:

Participants ... can replace the time they would devote to on-campus travel and teaching sessions with an immersion in the social contexts that resemble their future workplace: remote rural properties, home towns or neighbourhoods. (De Warren & Mensinga, 2004, p. 46)

The varying use of online technologies for learning and teaching also reflects varying practice contexts which employ social workers. It is almost inevitable that today’s social work students will, to some degree, find themselves working online and need to be prepared for this:

Distance education and online learning have proliferated in recent years as social work has started to explore their potential for meeting the needs of a changing student population and an increasingly technological society. Whereas there is arguably still much scepticism and fear in social work about the need or appropriateness of using technology and distance education, there seems to be an increasing acknowledgment that social work needs to adapt and evolve in order to survive and to thrive as a profession in the new millennium. Thus, it is critical that our profession continues to explore and evaluate new ways to effectively deliver social work education in a changing world. (Ayala, 2009, p. 284)

Online case management systems have long been the norm, particularly in large organisations such as government departments (Hough, 1994). However, but although digital literacy is now an expectation of social workers, many lack the degree of e-professionalism required for the “management of professional identity, confidentiality, and the creation of digital footprints” (Beaumont, Chester, & Rideout, 2017, p. 222). Such knowledge is required whether participating in online forums or even in one-to-one online communications for administrative purposes. Online learning spaces which provide discussion boards, create

opportunities for students to develop these skills in safe contexts where good practice can be modelled and feedback provided about communications which are unprofessional in online environment (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, many of the social workers in Centrelink, one of the largest employers of social workers in Australia, have been based in call centres and do much of their work with clients online rather than face to face (Humphries & Camilleri, 2002). Online learning environments have been able to respond to such innovations by providing opportunities for students to gain practice in providing social work services to people at a distance utilising conferencing software which enables role plays to be enacted and feedback provided in real time (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017). However, despite providers of services in rural and remote areas having long acknowledged the advantages for some clients in working online (Hunt, 2002), many social workers have had little or no training in providing services in the online environment and are unaware as to the potential for communication technologies to enhance their practice (Warburton, Cowan, Winterton, & Hodgkins, 2014).

There is also an increasing recognition that use of online information and communication technologies also have a place in face-to-face social work practice. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to encourage service users to use equipment such as iPads or smartphones to chronicle situations of concern, for example, by collecting digital photographs or sound recordings. Such artefacts might not only assist individuals to better explain their situation to those professionals they are working with, but provide evidence of need and/or outcomes. Applications have also been developed for iPads and smartphones which enable individuals to overcome social isolation due to illness or infirmity (Baker, Warburton, Hodgkin, & Pascal, 2014).

A further way in which components of online education contribute to the development of social work is to prepare graduates for active participation in continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Many CPD opportunities, including some offered to Australian social workers by the AASW (2017) are offered online. Such opportunities are particularly important for social workers who are unable to attend more traditional CPD activities offered face to face. However, social workers with little or no experience of online learning technologies may not be equipped to take full advantage of online CPD offerings (Warburton et al., 2013).

Challenges for Leaders in Social Work Education

Social work education and social work practice in the online environment are a reality in the 21st century. Yet it remains subject to intense scrutiny and criticism, predominantly on ideological grounds, and often based on 20th century notions of distance education, uninformed by understandings of what is actually possible using the latest technologies. Of course online teaching can be done poorly, but so can face-to-face teaching in a classroom. While very little has been published comparing educational outcomes of social work students who have studied at a distance or online to those who have studied in a conventional classroom, the data that are available suggest similar levels of attainment. Comparisons of learning outcomes between students taught on campus by experienced classroom teachers and students taught

by novices in the online environment may slightly favour on-campus teaching but such differences may disappear when all students are taught by teachers proficient in their teaching environments (Okech, Barner, Segoshi, & Carney, 2014). Furthermore, any reduction in attainment may be a reflection of online students having more caring or employment responsibilities and having less time to devote to their studies rather than being directly attributable to the mode of delivery (Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). Therefore, as leaders in social work education, we need to move beyond asking simplistic questions as to whether campus-based or online teaching is better (Ayala, 2009; Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). Rather, we need to be able to identify and recognise the strengths and limitations of different approaches. This includes understanding who benefits and who is disenfranchised by different teaching modalities. Focusing on learning outcomes (rather than mode of delivery) is likely to advance social work education in the contemporary environment.

In Australia, which is geographically the sixth largest country on this planet but with a relatively small population, various modes of distance education have long enabled geographically isolated Australians to gain educational qualifications rather than forego learning (Stacey, 2005). Recently I was present when an international colleague expressed the opinion that online education in social work was so abhorrent that leaders in social work education should not even be discussing this. This assertion failed to recognise that the geography and needs of different countries vary considerably and that not everyone lives in a country where few residents would live more than an hour or two away from the nearest university. It also suggests that online learning is inherently second-best or inferior to campus-based delivery. I was reminded of a story of a dinner party held in England early in the 20th century hosted by the Australian author Ethel Richardson (better known by her pseudonym, Henry Handel Richardson), and her husband. The guests included Agatha Christie, H. G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. At one point, they found themselves discussing Ethel's newly published book set in rural Victoria, unaware that she was the author:

Shaw said that he had found a mistake in the book where the author had said that it had not rained for five years. He said that there was no place in the world where it did not rain every three weeks. H.G. Wells found a mistake as well. The author had said that it was forty miles to the nearest doctor. This was absurd. He could imagine, it seemed, both a time machine and an invasion from Mars but he couldn't conceive of a world where there wasn't a village every two or three miles. (McGirr, 2004, p. 219)

In earlier eras when many of the leaders of social work education in Australia came from other countries importing foreign models of social work education without adapting them to the local needs and conditions was, at times, problematic (Miller, 2016; Puckett & Jones, 1979). Online education clearly suits and enhances student opportunities in countries such as Australia. At the same time, countries slow to adopt new technologies may find themselves left behind as students look to more innovative delivery of social work programs.

Perhaps inevitably those providing leadership in social work education will best respond to the needs of local and national stakeholders including employers and service users. It is nevertheless clear that some employers, at least in Australia, are offering positions to untrained staff because they cannot recruit qualified social workers. Online social work

education can play an important part in addressing workforce shortages, particularly in regional and remote areas.

As a social worker, abiding by the *Code of Ethics* I am expected to:

... respect diversity and use anti-oppressive practice principles, seeking to prevent and eliminate negative discrimination and oppression based on grounds such as: national origin, ethnicity, culture, appearance, language, sex or gender identity, sexual orientation or preference, ability, age, place of residence, religion, spirituality, political affiliation and social, economic, health/genetic, immigration or relationship status. (AASW, 2010, p. 19)

Hence, I would argue that developing access to online programs in social work education could be considered as being an ethical imperative and part of the social work profession's duty to provide effective services for the most vulnerable groups in our society (Horvath & Mills, 2011; Reamer, 2013). Online programs also respond to other ethical imperatives. It is not just access to social work education for people living in rural and remote areas who have benefitted from the advent of various modes of distance education. Historically social work students in Australia disproportionately came from privileged backgrounds (Martin, 1983) whereas distance education has enabled a much broader spectrum of society to be represented in social work (Oliaro & Trotter, 2010). At a time when there is increased recognition that traditional learning environments have not always met the needs of people living with a disability (Macaulay, Deppeler, & Agbenyega, 2016), online education has been seen as a solution to meeting the educational needs of this group, although poor design can render online learning resources inaccessible to people with sensory or motor disabilities (Littlefield, Rubenstein, & Pittman, 2015).

Despite the potential to attract a broader spectrum of society into social work education, this does not mean that every provider of social work education needs to have online offerings, and on-campus programs will continue to be relevant to many students (Wivell & Gay, 2015). We not only need to remember that students have different learning styles and learning needs, but also that not all institutions have the capacity or expertise to provide courses to both online and on-campus cohorts (Thomas & Quinney, 2011). However, irrespective of mode of provision, all education providers have a duty to their students as well as to the wider social work community, including service users, to ensure graduates have the appropriate skills, knowledge and aptitude for professional practice (Vernon et al., 2009).

In Australia, the costs of providing social work education are not recognised by the model of funding from the Commonwealth Government (AASW, 2014). Unlike in the UK, where a number of social work programs have closed since the commencement of the 21st century (Walton, 2016), no Australian university has divested itself of social work education in recent times. Nevertheless, the financial viability of retaining social work is an issue in some universities (AASW, 2014) and the search for cost-effective means of delivery is resulting in more universities exploring the online option (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017; Horvath & Mills, 2011). However, there are some cautions that need to be heeded as high-quality online education provision is not a cheap alternative (Littlefield, Rubenstein, & Pittman, 2015). Cheap online courses may be little more than lists of readings, and a recording of

a lecture offered on campus. By comparison, high-quality online delivery is resource-intensive, both in the creation of learning resources and in providing support to students (Wivell & Day, 2015). Moreover, substantially online education requires a whole of institution response. It is not sufficient for a program to opt for online development if the university infrastructure of support services (such as study skills advisors, student counsellors, the library and so on) are only available to students who can attend these on campus. For leaders of social work programs planning to expand their online teaching, ensuring sufficient resources in terms of both academic staff and technical support is essential (Horvath & Mills, 2011). It also takes considerable time to design a program of instructional materials, even if the topics have previously been taught in a conventional classroom (Wivell & Day, 2015). As Thomas and Quinney found:

Writing for the screen required a different mindset/skillset which had to be quickly learned. Our familiar day-to-day tools as educators and authors were the spoken and written word but writing for the screen required condensed ideas, limited words, visual impact, often a nonlinear format. (Thomas & Quinney, 2011, p. 79)

As educators who have moved into the online environment, my colleagues and I have had to rethink how we teach and recognise that retention of learning outcomes should have precedence over maintenance of a method of teaching (Maidment, 2005). Had we been too fixed in our ideas as to how learning is best facilitated, we could have easily found that our online courses to be “pale imitations of what is taught to on campus students” (Crisp, 1999, p. 34), rather than being a legitimate and high-quality alternative (Goldingay & Boddy, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Social work education and social work practice are occurring in the online environment, and will continue to do so, providing leadership opportunities within the academy and the social work profession more broadly. Rather than reacting, we need to be setting the agenda (Reamer, 2017) in ways that advance the discipline. While one approach to this has been to delineate what *can* from what *should not* be taught online, there is little agreement, particularly in relation to practice skills. Some have argued on ideological grounds that it is not appropriate to teach interpersonal skills in an online environment (Vernon et al., 2009) while others have argued that emerging technologies not only make this possible but that students learn just as effectively (Goldingay & Land, 2014). Providing disciplinary leadership the Council for Social Work Education in the United States, has for some years accredited fully online social work degrees provided they can demonstrate the same learning requirements as expected of any social work program (Vernon et al., 2009). This is an important example of a system that focuses on learning outcomes regardless of the mode of delivery. Blakely’s proposal some 25 years ago as to what was critical for a social work program taught at a distance is just as relevant today in respect of online social work education:

The objectives of a distance education program should not vary from the objectives of a face-to-face program. Rather, in the planning of distance education the program should simulate the regular program. In addition, the school’s mission would be the same; the organization of the school in terms of its particular curriculum or tracks would be unaltered. Likewise, the admissions process, course requirements, and faculty would remain the same. (Blakely, 1992, p. 215)

While the graduate outcomes for online programs should not be compromised by the delivery of learning online rather than in a traditional classroom, online courses which seek to merely emulate their on campus equivalents are likely to result in poorer learning outcomes for students. However, adept use of the functionalities offered by online teaching platforms can result in students rating the quality of the learning equivalent, if not higher than their on-campus counterparts (Koszalka & Ganesan, 2004).

In terms of technology and what is possible, the online world is changing rapidly, and it seems unlikely that the social work community will readily come to a consensus as to what is “best practice” or even what are the minimal requirements that should be met when teaching social work in the online environment. Leaders of social work education are charged by the profession with safeguarding the educational standards. That responsibility however, does not mean holding onto methods of delivering social work education just because historically they have served us well, or at least adequately, in previous eras (Goldingay & Land, 2014). Rather, it requires leaders to continually push the boundaries of innovation while at the same time support the best learning outcomes for students of social work education.

Finally, it is important that debates about the relative merits of distance or online education do not obscure appropriate responses by educators to:

The relatively recent emergence of new clinical tools and other technologically-driven options [which] has added a new set of essential competencies for social workers who choose to incorporate them in their work. Use of this technology requires a great deal of technical mastery in addition to awareness of, and compliance with, rapidly developing standards of care and ethical guidelines. (Reamer, 2017, p. 153)

It is now recognised that all providers of social work education will need to address, not only digital literacy, but also enable graduates to engage with the emerging new ethical issues associated with social work in the digital age (Beaumont et al., 2017; Reamer, 2017). These include grappling with issues of confidentiality and informed consent, for example, which may be less straightforward in a digital environment than they might be face to face. There is also the growing realisation that every new technological innovation which finds its way into social work practice is accompanied by ethical considerations which must be acknowledged (for further details see Reamer, 2017; see also Beaumont et al., 2017 for guidelines relating to ethical social work practice involving social media sites). While those of us who teach online are being forced to grapple with such realities, the issue becomes, not whether it is unethical to teach social work online, but whether we are doing enough to prepare students for 21st century practice if they have little or no exposure to learning contexts which prepare them for working online.

References

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2010). *Code of ethics*. Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201>
- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2012). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards*, (v. 1.4). Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/100>
- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2014). *Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation*

- Committee re: *Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill 2014*. Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/6598>
- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2016). *Submissions to the ASWEAS review*. Canberra, Act: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/careers-study/asweas-review-2016-submissions>
- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2017). *Social work online training (SWOT)*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/professional-development/swot-social-work-online-training>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Household use of information technology, Australia*. Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/8146.0Main%20Features12014-15?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=8146.0&issue=2014-15&num=&view=>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Internet activity, Australia, December 2016*. Canberra, ACT: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/8153.0Main+Features1December%202016?OpenDocument>
- Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work (ACHSSW). (2016). *Submission to ASWEAS review*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8912>
- Ayala, J. S. (2009). Blended learning as a new approach to social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 45*(2), 277–288.
- Baker, S., Warburton, J., Hodgkin, S., & Pascal, J. (2014). Reimagining the relationship between social work and information communication technology in the network society. *Australian Social Work, 67*(4), 467–478.
- Beaumont, E., Chester, P., & Rideout, H. (2017). Navigating ethical challenges in social media: Social work student and practitioner perspectives. *Australian Social Work, 70*(2), 221–228.
- Blackboard. (2017). *Blackboard collaborate*. Retrieved from <http://www.blackboard.com/online-collaborative-learning/blackboard-collaborate.aspx>
- Blakely, T. J. (1992). A model for distance education delivery. *Journal of Social Work Education, 28*(2), 214–221.
- Condliffe, P. (1991). Bringing social work education to the bush: Addressing the rural decline? *Australian Social Work, 44*(2), 11–17.
- Crisp, B. R. (1999). Not in the classroom: Teaching social work research to off campus students. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education, 2*(2), 34–41.
- De Warren, D., & Mensinga, J. (2004). Innovative social work education across distance: community focussed learning. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education, 6*(1), 46–63.
- Goldingay, S., & Boddy, J. (2017). Preparing social work graduates for digital practice: Ethical pedagogies for effective learning. *Australian Social Work, 70*(2), 209–220.
- Goldingay, S., & Land, C. (2014). Emotion: the “E” in engagement in online distance education in social work. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, 18*(1), 58–72.
- Horvath, V.E., & Mills, C.S. (2011). The challenges for faculty using interactive television in distance education. *Journal of Technology in Human Services, 29*(1), 33–48.
- Hough, G. (1994). Post-industrial work? The use of information technology in the restructuring of state social service work. In J. Ife, S. Leitmann, & P. Murphy (Eds.), *Advances in social work and welfare education: A collection of papers given at the National Conference of the Australian Association for Social Work and Welfare Education* (pp. 56–62). Perth, WA: School of Social Work, University of Western Australia.
- Humphries, P., & Camilleri, P. (2002). Social work and technology: Challenges for social workers in practice: A case study. *Australian Social Work, 55*(4), 251–259.
- Hunt, S. (2002). In favour of online counselling? *Australian Social Work, 55*(4), 260–267.
- James Cook University, & Australian Association of Social Workers. (2016). *National Study of Social Work Students: Briefing Paper – Important emerging findings*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8772>
- Koszalka, T., & Ganesan, R. (2004). Designing online courses: A taxonomy to guide strategic use of features available in course management systems (CMS) in distance education. *Distance Education, 25*(2), 243–256.
- Littlefield, M. B., Rubinstein, K., & Pittman, M. E. (2015). Beyond PowerPoint™: Using learning objects to enhance social work courses. *Journal of Technology in Human Services, 33*(2), 172–190.

- Macaulay, L., Deppeler, J., & Agbenyega, J. (2016). Access to quality education for students with disability. *Journal of Social Inclusion, 7*(2), 3–17.
- McGirr, M. (2004). *Bypass: The story of a road*. Sydney, NSW: PanMacmillan Australia.
- Maidment, J. (2005). Teaching social work online: Dilemmas and debates. *Social Work Education, 24*(2), 185–195.
- Martin, E. M. (1983). "The importance of the trained approach": Social work education in South Australia 1935–1946. *Australian Social Work, 36*(1), 11–22.
- Miller, J. (2016). *Leading social work: 75 years at the University of Melbourne*. North Melbourne, VIC: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- Moulding, M. N. (2010). Intelligent design: Student perceptions of teaching and learning in large social work classes. *Higher Education Research & Development, 29*(2), 151–165.
- Okech, D., Barner, J., Segoshi, M., & Carney, M. (2014). MSW student experience in online vs. face-to-face teaching formats. *Social Work Education, 33*(1), 121–135.
- Oliaro, L., & Trotter, C. (2010). A comparison of on-campus and off-campus (or distance) social work education. *Australian Social Work, 63*(3), 329–344.
- Puckett, T., & Jones, A. (1979). Social work education in Australia: The late 1970s. *Canadian Journal of Social Work Education/Revue Canadienne D'éducation en Service Social, 5*(2/3), 48–75.
- Reamer, F. G. (2013). Social work in a digital age: Ethical and risk management strategies. *Social Work, 58*(2), 163–172.
- Reamer, F. G. (2017). Evolving ethical standards in the digital age. *Australian Social Work, 70*(2), 148–159.
- Smart Sparrow. (2017). *Create learning experiences as unique as your students*. Retrieved from <https://www.smartsparrow.com/>
- Stacey, E. (2005). A history of distance education in Australia. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 6*(3), 253–259.
- Thomas, J., & Quinney, A. (2011). Negotiating the content and process of collaborative practice in the development of open access e-learning resources: A case study from the social work curriculum in England. *Journal of Technology in Human Services, 29*(1), 64–81.
- Turnitin. (2017). *Your partner in education with integrity*. Retrieved from http://turnitin.com/en_us/home
- University of British Columbia. (2004, October 15). UBC computer scientist wins \$100,000 award for popular course software. *University of British Columbia News & Events*. Retrieved from <http://news.ubc.ca/ubcnewsdigest/2004/04oct15.html#4>
- University of Queensland Social Work Program. (2016). *Submission to ASWEAS review*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/8890>
- Vernon, R., Vakalahi, H., Pierce, D., Pittman-Munke, P., & Adkins, L. F. (2009). Distance education programs in social work: Current and emerging trends. *Journal of Social Work Education, 45*(2), 263–276.
- Walton, A. (2016). Social work education and training as a policy issue. In T. Evans, & F. Keating (Eds.) *Policy and Social Work Practice* (pp. 31–47). London, UK: Sage.
- Warburton, J., Cowan, S., Winterton, R., & Hodgkins, S. (2014). Building social inclusion for rural older people using information and communication technologies: perspectives of rural practitioners. *Australian Social Work, 67*(4), 479–494.
- Wheeler, S. (2006). Learner support needs in online problem-based learning. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 7*(2), 175–184.
- Wivell, J., & Day, S. (2015). Blended learning and teaching: Synergy in action. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education, 17*(2), 86–99.
- Zuber, W. J. (2016). The flipped classroom: A review of the literature. *Industrial and Commercial Training, 48*(2), 97–103.

The power of the case study within practice, education and research

Monica Short, Heather Barton, Brian Cooper, Mark Woolven, Melissa Loos and Jan Devos

Monica Short: Charles Sturt University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sydney

Heather Barton: Department of Family and Community Services, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga

Brian Cooper: National Ethnic Disability Alliance NSW, Charles Sturt University, Sydney

Mark Woolven: Life Without Barriers, Charles Sturt University, Sydney

Melissa Loos: Westmead/Auburn Hospital, Charles Sturt University, Sydney

Jan Devos: Marist Youth Care, Charles Sturt University, Sydney

Address for Correspondence:

mshort@csu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

The case study method is a popular pedagogical tool within social work education. It is, however, unclear if individual organisations, students, practitioners and academics have fully appraised the value and power of the case study beyond research activities. This article describes a critical reflection exercise into the functionality of the case study method. It presents the themes from a co-operative inquiry conducted by six professionals with experience in social work field education. This professional collaboration, informed by the authors' practice knowledge, considers how the case study enhances practice, education, research and personal and professional development within an organisational context. Emerging key themes indicate that the case study method is not confined to research and that it can also be extensively applied within field education and industry. A case study can be a powerful learning tool sparking empathy, providing context to situations, allowing people to connect to social phenomena intellectually and emotionally, counterbalancing efficiency-driven environments and enabling ethical practice. The inquiry concludes that, when applying the case study, it is important to be reflexive and reflective in utilising the method, and to elicit the humanity of a situation respectfully.

Keywords: *Case study; Co-operative inquiry; Reflexivity; Reflective practice; Field education; Workplace learning*

INTRODUCTION

This study is a co-operative inquiry into the functions, value and power of the case study. It aims to reflect critically on the case study method as a didactic tool utilised in, and beyond, research. Additionally it encourages students, workers and academics to be “thinking, doing and being” professionals when engaging with case studies. A co-operative inquiry methodology collects co-authors’ practice wisdom and knowledge about an inquiry area. This inquiry provides an opportunity to review the functionality of case studies through an alternative lens – one valuing reflexivity. The purpose of this inquiry is to consider the research question what do we (the authors, through our experience in field education, practice and research) perceive to be case study functions? This includes considering themes such as what a case study is and why it is valuable; and how the case study approach enhances practice, education, research, personal and professional development and/or knowledge within an organisational or human services sector’s context.

Three industry-based social workers with experience in work-based learning, also known as field education, initiated this project. They proposed an experiential research and professional development opportunity which drew out themes common to various human service sector workplaces, made strong connections between theory and practice, and facilitated reflective and reflexive thinking. An industry and university research collaboration formed with five human services practitioners and one academic. We recognised, through this collaboration, that we utilised individual and collective case studies, sometimes with minimal contemplation, for diverse reasons in a variety of contexts. It was unclear to us if our organisations, or others, have critically appraised the functions, value and power of the case study across its numerous applications within industry. It appeared to us that literature more often commentates on one application of the case study, which is its usefulness as a research method. In contrast, we present a broad spectrum of application, one authentically reflecting our wide usage of the case study method across practice and academia. This paper outlines our personal experiences of applying the case study within the human services sector.

The Case Study

The case study draws upon testimonies, narratives, professional knowledge and/or experiences, allowing reflexivity and reflection to occur. It is widely applied within the human services sector, social work education and research by practitioners, managers, students and academics. Its amorphous nature necessitates a broad understanding of the case study method, one that includes and extends beyond research methods.

The case study is acknowledged for its strength as a research method (for example, Alston & Bowles, 2013) partly due to its flexibility. Within education or training it is recognised as a: supervision technique for students and staff (for example, Agllias et al., 2010); teaching method (Pawar, 2004); a performance and development activity; and a training and quality assurance feedback mechanism (for example, Australian Public Service Commission, 2012). Within practice, the case study is a: practice reflection activity (for example, Healy, 2014; Jones-Mutton, 2011); summary of clinical interactions, case notes and/or data mining (for example, Budgell, 2008; Jones & Russell, 2008); recruitment strategy (Victorian Government Youth Central, 2014); funding application technique (*The Guardian*, 2016); promotional

activity (for example, Myer Foundation, 2016); critical incident, crisis and risk management tool (for example, AHC Media, 2016).

The case study can be a useful exploratory approach (Short, 2015) for through it an intentional, in-depth learning context arises (Jones & Russell, 2008). A strength of the case study is it allows an exchange of meaning to occur. This meaning provides context to quantitative data and also to situations experienced by people such as the briefing and debriefing of actions. Such exchanges encourage “doing, thinking and being” by practitioners, students, teachers and researchers (Pawar & Anscombe, 2015).

This co-operative inquiry began as a conversation between five industry leaders who supervise social work students within a variety of work environments and one academic. A co-operative inquiry is a participatory, democratic, inclusive and potentially emancipatory qualitative research methodology (Bridges & McGee, 2010). It involves collecting a variety of resources such as literature about a focal area, inquirers’ narratives about their experiences of that area and relevant general information (Short & Healy, 2017). The inquirers meet regularly and discuss this collection, also known as data, and repeatedly cycle over the data until key themes emerge which can inform practice (Short & Healy, 2017). We chose this methodology for this research project because it would describe the power of the case study in and beyond research activities, as well as generate knowledge. What ensued from the inquiry was an amalgamation of our thoughts about the disparate reasons for when and why the case study is used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two centuries after Fredrick Le Play’s pioneering work, the case study continues to be widely utilised within the human services and other sectors (Gerring, 2007). This is because the case study method has many strengths, such its ability to outline both content and processes for a situation, extend practice, aid practical deliberation and assist reflection about events or information (Wall, 2006). The Harvard Business School, as an example, has utilised cases as an educational and knowledge generating tool for discussion and analysis since around 1870 (Jones, 2005; Jones & Russell, 2008).

In a research environment, Yin (2014) argues a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in a real life context. In other environments, like social work field education and practice, a strength is its ability to demonstrate particular points about a situation more effectively (Yin, 2014).

The case study method, in research and other environments, may involve investigating a single case (Swanborn, 2010, p. 14). In this situation the method’s strength is its ability to emphasise one phenomenon such as an individual, household or family’s circumstances (Radley & Chamberlain, 2011). Alternatively, the case study may involve investigating multiple (collective or comparative) studies about a general phenomenon (Silverman, 2010; Swanborn, 2010). In this situation, the collective case study’s strength is its ability to compare and contrast a set of paradigms (Zucker, 2009); and to accommodate multiple variables and sources of evidence (Yin, 2014).

Navigating ethical issues when working with the case study in practice and academia is necessary. For example, de-identifying a story with the altruistic aim of protecting the confidentiality of an individual (Silverman & Patterson, 2015) can potentially make a case study vulnerable to bias. The anonymising process risks diluting the experience being considered and also disconnecting the person and their situation from the process.

Another dilemma is related to a recognised strength of the case study, that is its element of contextualisation. When exploring a case study we need to be clear about to what contexts we are connecting our reflections, analysis, interpretations and reporting (Crowe et al., 2011), such as deciding if it is research or client work and thus ensuring our own personal or organisational context does not encrypt the analysis.

Reflexivity assists in navigating such ethical dilemmas by ensuring people are cognisant of their biases and preferences (Silverman & Patterson, 2015). Reflexivity can inform the de-identifying process and our connections to the case study processes (Silverman & Patterson, 2015).

Our interrogation of the literature found that the case study within a research context has been extensively described and often carefully critiqued. For example, it is described as “the imagination of the person doing the case study” (Simon, 2009, p. 206). Some are circumspect about utilising the case study, their critiques arguing it contains non-generalised theories, biased case selection, informal and undisciplined designs, subjective conclusions, non-replicability, and causal determinism (Gerring, 2007). Others believe the case study can become uncontrollable, uninterpretable, incoherent (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013), underdeveloped, complicated (Yin, 2009), and unable to capture the intricacies of real life (Bernard, 2012). We felt it would be helpful to remember these critiques when applying the case study beyond research, such as in field education.

We also noticed that, over the last few decades, the literature appears to classify the case study sometimes as a qualitative method (Yin, 2014), and at other times as a method generating quantitative data (Thomas, 2011). The literature, however, does not always seem to emphasise its intentional conversational aspects such as in practice, nor the range of the case study functions, power and usefulness. Our exploration of the literature led us to realise that there appears to be a dearth of critique about how the case study can be presented through a variety of modes of communication including multimedia display, paperless and/or on paper.

Our co-operative inquiry group was conscious of the gaps in the literature and that these gaps appeared to be due to the extant literature often focusing on research at the expense of other applications. Extensive analysis and discussion convinced us that the case study, when used in a structured way in research (as well as in social work education or the workplace), can lead to powerful and valuable insights about process. It can encourage or initiate changes within individuals, organisations and practice alongside research (Zucker, 2009). In this inquiry we decided, in contrast to some literature, to adopt a wide and inclusive definition, which is to consider the case study to be a valuable in-depth examination of a case (or cases) within a real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). We also suggest it is important for human service sector workers, and potential workers, to be “thinking, doing and being”

professionals or students who are reflexive and reflective in how they apply the case study within their environment.

Reflective and reflexivity exercise

Reflection and reflexivity are amorphous terms, theorised and defined in many ways (Adamson, 2011). They are sometimes used interchangeably and at other times seen as two different concepts (Gray, 2007). This project's inquirers perceive these concepts as different, complementary and resources for underpinning conversations about the power and value of the case study.

Critical reflection is a key mechanism in critical thinking, facilitating growth and change (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Forneris & Peden-McAlpine, 2016). Reflection is a conscious bringing to the surface of different forms of knowledge, while attending to the thoughts and emotions present within the student or practitioner during and after the experience (Davys & Beddoe, 2009). Reflection is not intuitive and those reflecting benefit from a clear, structured facilitation of their experiences (Davys & Beddoe, 2009; Gursansky, Quinn, & Sueur, 2010) such as when reflecting on a case study.

Implicit in a case study, or "learning story," is the aim of moving someone through reflection towards an increased level of knowledge, improved practice, skill and awareness (Leggett & Ford, 2013). This may be possible because a case study can inspire people, identify what works, teach lessons and make connections with ideas that resonate with current practice and thinking (Calma, 2008, para. 51). It can also facilitate reflexivity.

Reflexivity may be described as a student's, worker's, supervisor's or researcher's critical awareness of the factors influencing knowledge creation (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2006). It includes acknowledging the impact of the dynamic relationship existing between someone's thoughts and feelings (D'Cruz et al., 2006). Reflexivity can inform reflective thinking, and vice-versa. It is one tool for dealing with new, troubling or novel situations (Watts, 2015), such as those described within a case study. Reflexive thinking via a case study may be helpful for people associated with the human services sector. This is because presently this sector is immersed in restructuring and fast-changing global and local trends such as neo-liberal market principles, global managerialism, user-pay systems, technology, and aging populations (for example, EY, 2016; Zuchowski, Hudson, Bartlett, & Diamandi, 2014). The sector may be tempted to rely on customary actions and/or established social policies and procedures in dealing with its contemporary challenges (Archer, 2010). Case studies applying reflexivity principles may assist in considering alternative possibilities.

Reflexivity also assists investigations into current complex issues, which the human services sector faces, that cannot necessarily be solved by habitual actions (Archer, 2010). It is an attempt to prevent ineffective interventions and to ensure contemplation (Watts, 2015).

Reflexivity allows a person to explore and understand their influence on a given event or society, within a set of contextual frameworks or environments (Beres, Bowles, & Fook, 2011; Fook, 2012). This includes them considering their position in society, how it is constructed and its associated power (Watts, 2015). Such detailed critical contemplations,

such as through case studies, can be powerful and transformational for the student, worker or researcher and also for their human services context and operational boundaries (Kessl, 2009).

We agreed to be both reflective and reflexive in undertaking this research project. This approach to the inquiry first, assisted us in discussing our understanding of the ontology of the case study approach including its functions, value and power. Second, it supported our reflecting on the assumptions (hidden theory) embedded in our thinking about the case study and exposing these for examination (Fook, 2012). This was with the aim of improving our practice, teaching and research activities (Fook, 2012). Third, it provided new meanings and transformational experiences that allowed each of us to develop internally and professionally (Giles, Epstein, & Rhodes, 2011). This inquiry began with each of us acknowledging who we are, how we apply the case study method and situating ourselves within our associated environments.

The participants

Six inquirers participated in this research – four of us are female, two are male, all over 45 years old and each with over 25 years' experience within the welfare industry. We apply the case study method within our work. Mark uses the case study to simulate and reflect on critical incidents in supervision and for supporting recruitment processes. Melissa uses it to promote workers' and students' professional development and critical reflective practice. Jan utilises case study within staff supervision, student education and recruitment. Brian finds the case study method essential in developing social work students' capacity to reflect critically on practice and questions of ethics. Heather composes and utilises the case study in degree and postgraduate education, workplace learning, recruitment, supervision and staff coaching. The case study is one of Monica's preferred research methods for engaging with faith-based organisations.

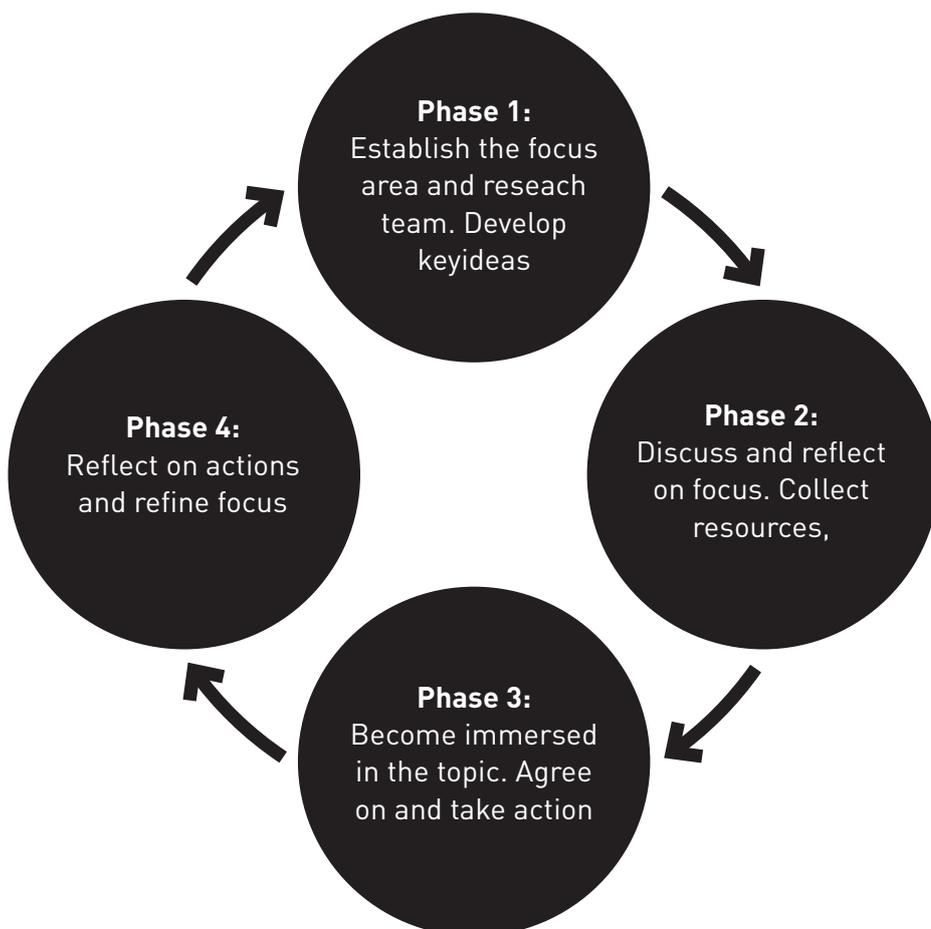
We all have utilised the case study to enhance our own and other's knowledge and wished to reflect on this common experience. Anscombe (2001) and Pawar and Anscombe (2015) argue social workers need to be professionals who “think, do and be,” where *thinking* means applying knowledge, *doing* means practising and *being* means recognising people both shape (and are shaped) by their environment. We agree with their thesis, but extend it as being relevant for all human sector professionals. This approach gave us the opportunity to undertake a reflective and reflexive conversation about how we personally and professionally use case study to develop the *thinking, doing and being* competencies in others and ourselves.

METHOD

A co-operative inquiry is a non-traditional approach to research focusing on researching *with* people rather than *about* people (Reason & Heron, 2013). It is also an accessible research methodology that encourages inclusive research, allowing people from different workplaces and research experience to write as equals within a community (Short & Healy, 2017). This methodology is compatible with the idea that theory and practice are closely related, and is easily adapted to researching different social phenomena (Jones-Mutton, Short, Bidgood, & Jones, 2015).

We chose this methodology because it weaves practice knowledge or wisdom into theoretical frameworks (Howard, 2009). Our use of individual and collective case studies inspired us to start this co-operative inquiry and expand the existing practice wisdom about and theoretical understandings of the topic (Short & Healy, 2017). This inquiry methodology allowed us to consider the case study method through an alternative research lens; one that could challenge and extend our practice. The diagram below outlines the different stages of this methodology:

Figure 1. Co-operative inquiry phases Source: Short & Healy, 2017.



In phase one, we came together as co-inquirers, reflected on the topic and agreed to become co-researchers; we formed a focus group also known as a focal group or inquiry group (Healy, Tillotson, Short, & Hearn, 2015). We launched this case study topic, agreed to meet weekly for three months and developed guidelines on how to collect and analyse our data. The minutes of each inquiry meeting were our data. We then cycled into phase two and became the co-subjects; we collected narratives and discussed our experiences of applying the case study method (Baldwin, 2006). We also undertook a reflexivity and reflection exercise; and as thinking, doing and being professionals we considered both how our practice and our identity influenced this research. In phase three, we immersed ourselves in the topic, consciously developing a new awareness of the functions and power of the case study (Healy et al., 2015). In phase four, we reflected on our actions, proposed

new themes for exploration and sorted our data into themes with assistance from a computer program NVIVO 10 (Oates, 2002; QSR International, 2014). As co-researchers, we cycled through our ideas until we were ready to finalise the project through the writing of this paper (Oates, 2002). The themes and insights we gained about our work and the themes generated by this research surprised us.

Forming a Research and Writing Community

We each have different reasons for joining this project. Uniting us is our interest in research, our experience in applying the case study method to our work, our commitment to social work field education and our dedication to the human services sector. Undertaking reflective and reflexivity exercises regarding our application of the case study approach was challenging and transformational. Our reflections on this research project allowed each of us to re-examine the fundamental basis on which we interpret the use of case study (Fook, 2012). For example, our conversation about the functionality and content of the case study allowed us to develop a more informed understanding of how we apply it. Our reflexivity helped us consider our own influence and the influence of our social and cultural context on the research (Fook, 2012; Pawar & Anscombe, 2015). Mark provides an example of this from his workplace.

I work with staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (about 85% of staff). Each comes with a different lens, life experiences, cultural understandings, and these impacts upon their approach to situations. Our agency use case study as a way to place colleagues safely within a situation or critical incident. They then can work through their reactions, internal thinking and the way they would handle that situation. It is about using the clients' voice within the narrative to help others reflect on themselves and on incidents.

Key Themes from the Inquiry Conversation (Results and Discussion)

We met weekly, via the telephone for about three months. Below is an overview of the themes and our thinking.

What is a Case Study? Is it Valuable?

A case study aims to depict people's experiences as authentically as possible within a narrative, and we believe this makes it valuable for our work situations. To us, this is because a case study potentially draws out events that are occurring within an environment (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana). The information drawn can be rich, vivid and condensed and therefore has the potential to feel real (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The intricacies and complexities of phenomena may also be included (Miles et al., 2014). This can allow those studying the case access to the potential causation that is being played out (Miles et al., 2014). Two examples of this are provided:

Monica: A colleague was concerned she was not fully understanding the situation of some people she was counselling and was reviewing her interventions. She converted her case notes as authentically as she could into a series of cases, anonymised the data and presented them to us via PowerPoint at a meeting. We assisted her with deconstructing and reconstructing her perceptions about the case.

Monica: *A student was nervous about interviewing a person who was homeless. I drafted a case study. The student and I role-played the scenario taking turns to be the person providing counselling and the person receiving the counselling. We then critically reflected upon the student's listening skills, counselling approach, theoretical knowledge, interventions and possible referral strategy. This gave the student the confidence to interview the person when they attended the office.*

The case study, whether presented on paper, as a display or through an intentional conversation, or all three as Monica's above examples demonstrate, appear to us to be a very popular didactic and pedagogical tool. We regularly experience and apply the case study approach, as shown in the quoted examples below.

Brian: *A case study provides for the student on placement the opportunity to have that "light bulb" moment when what is considered useless or complex makes sense. For example, a student had difficulty thinking through an issue which had raised for them an ethical dilemma. In supervision we discussed a case study and explored the issues. I was able to gently assist the student to think through what is feasible, what is ethical and what theories they can apply to the situation.*

Heather: *The aim is to allow people to have a safe space for a supported experience where they can develop their skills, knowledge and awareness in a realistic way. For example, we use case studies to help orientate staff and students to the workplace.*

Within our workplaces, the case study is often utilised to facilitate reflexivity and reflection on ideas, practice, theories, structures and research. The extant literature also indicates this. For example, Pawar and Anscombe (2015), use the case study to explore the practice elements of individual and family work, the critical elements for reflective practice with communities and the terms *administrator*, *manager*, and *leader* within an organisation.

Content, Value, and Power of Case Study

Our initial conversation focused on the substance of a case study. Its didactic story assists people to engage with a social phenomenon intellectually and/or emotionally. This becomes possible because it gives context to situations allowing people to imagine and connect with them or with it. We thought this was one reason a case study appears powerful, for it engenders the movement beyond seeing an event or person as a cog or number within a bureaucracy – as evidenced here.

Brian: *The case study can give humanity to the person. Such as, when I am writing a response to a policy and I am reviewing quantitative data about a community or a group of people, a case study gives the story that exists behind the statistics, it humanises the people the statistics are describing.*

This humanising of social phenomena and the people associated with them, brings alive the context and content of an event, and simulates an activity, incident or investigation.

The case study can also counterbalance an efficiency-driven organisational environment whereby researchers, staff and students focus on meeting timelines, performance indicators or assessment activities. It can confront the risk of people habitually moving on to the next task without making time for contemplation. Melissa explains this:

Being in the public service for many years, I have noted an increase in pace. This involved a movement away from such things as spending time writing process recordings and reflecting on a case to quick electronic notes.

In contrast, the case study creates space for reflection, sparks connections and empathy, and encourages people to apply their emotional intelligence in a respectful and a reflexive way. Reflection and reflexivity creates the possibility of confronting personal perceptions, exploring beyond experience, engaging with alternative narratives and creating an opportunity for success to be realised.

We were quite impressed with these aspects of the case study, as Melissa explains:

It is about connecting with other human beings. It gets practitioners and students thinking quite deeply.

Such connection and engagement occurs because other faculties were involved (for example, emotion, imagination, and identification) rather than only logical thinking. This experience was outlined in our following conversation pieces:

Melissa: *It's a valuable time to stop, reflect, pause and consider the lives of the humans we are interfacing with...*

Jan: *It makes you wonder about situations...*

Monica: *We consider our own feelings, responses, ideas. We regard these connections between learning and feelings and/or imagination, as described in the above conversation pieces, to be important. "Relatively few scholars and practitioners in adult and higher education regard emotion as integral to the meaning-making process and as demonstrative of underlying and largely unconscious forms of meaning largely associated with learning" (Dirkx, 2006, p. 15). Harnessing the power of emotion, imagination and identification with the content through a case study, we consider a valuable basis for powerful learning. We perceive it to be transformational for all involved – that is the researcher, worker or student, the client or participant, and the organisation.*

Case Study Functions such as Research Within the Human Services Sector

Our inquiry highlighted different organisational contexts in which the case study operates. We categorised these into areas related to staff training and development; organisational benefits such as research, funding and recruitment; and student field education.

Staff training and development.

We utilise case study for reflection on peer or client interactions; staff education, skill development, preparation for a process or task, orientation, training, such as in workplace health and safety, and policy implementation. In these situations the case study can provide a clearer conceptualisation of context issues and organisational expectations. The comment below reflects this:

Mark: *It also about the organisation. Drawing out what does the organisation expect us to do around a situation ... It allows people to develop professionally and provides opportunities for people to form different perspectives on activities.*

We perceive the case study as also useful for briefing and debriefing researchers, students and staff undertaking a process or around critical incidents. It can orientate people; increase people's confidence in their roles; promote participants', clients' or practitioners' safety; encourage quality service provision and improve practice. Heather observed this regarding practice:

For example, a case study in the child protection context can be used to step through the procedures required to respond to an initial report received, as well as a point of reflection for how the content of that report relates to the level of risk to the children who are subject to that report.

When reflecting on work-based crises, critical incidents and difficult or complex interactions, the case study was identified by us as a retrospective organisational or research tool used to illuminate processes and improve future procedures and practice. It allows the tracing of issues with operational links across time (Yin, 2009, p. 9, cited in Baskarada, 2014, p. 4).

Organisational benefits such as research and funding.

We are impressed with the case study functionality. Two authors spoke of utilising the case study in researching community engagements and organisational expectations or values. Two have used it as part of staff interview processes. The case study has also been used by an author's organisations in promotional advertising; to provide stories to program supporters; to advocate for resources with internal committees; to review outcomes; as an adjunct to statistics; to explain content within reports; and as a means of connecting staff with the organisation's aims, goals or client group.

For example, we were aware that case study research can be well suited to the investigation and/or research of issues. This is because it incorporates multi-variant contextual conditions and multiple sources of data (Yin, 2003). It is useful when the phenomenon under study is complex and not well conceptualised (Yin, 2003, p. 4, cited in Plath, 2014, p. 908). Monica gives an example of this from a recent project.

In 2015 I completed a research project into Anglican Churches engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Short, 2015). The research partners and I were keen to collect data from different locations, different churches, from a wide as possible group of people who were from a variety of cultures and across the adult age spectrum. The project was complex. The method I chose was a collective case study, because it successfully facilitated the collection of data from multiple sources and contexts.

Regarding networking and funding, we observed the case study as helpful in connecting external people with an organisation. These connections assisted us in obtaining additional support, referrals, funding, and networks. Two examples:

Jan: *In my previous employment, we had a request from a government agency for a report about a program and were asked to provide case studies. I thought that was a refreshing change. It made the report more interesting...*

Jan: *A manager was always asking for case studies for various advertisements. She requested anonymised descriptions of situations.*

Social work student field education.

For field educators, the case study can be a tool for interviewing students before commencing a placement. In this context it provides an opportunity for the prospective field educator/supervisor to gauge the prospective student's existing knowledge, their capacity to apply that knowledge and to some degree their cognitive skills and abilities in transferring learning to new contexts.

For social work students, the case study may be a pedagogical tool enabling them to process differences in practice contexts – for example between rural and urban localities. It allows students to form their social work identity and to critically consider how policies, organisational forms, and resources might impact on people requesting or requiring social work or other interventions. In these applications, the case study can highlight social justice issues and ethical dilemmas. It can also assist the student to consider what it means to respond as a thinking, doing and being professional applying the Australian Association of Social Workers (2010) *Code of Ethics* and/or other ethical frameworks.

These points about field education lead us to consider that a case study's explorations are a rich, useful and powerful tool in preparing students for industry; particularly when it is followed up with an investigation into relevant literature or procedures. This is demonstrated by the following comment:

Mark: *We use case study in our therapeutic modelling... This is a challenge for some students... There is a story, and they are learning from it and adding to it.*

LIMITATIONS

This research project has a number of limitations with both its methodology and scope. First, the circular methodology used in this project does not fully represent the diversity of thinking or the full spectrum of problems within the field (Short & Healy, 2017), such as field education. The inquiry's focus on extant literature, its valuing of inquirers' experiences and acceptance of non-traditional knowledge means it does not test concepts or propose conclusive findings about practice, education or research.

Second, the scope of this inquiry is narrow, presenting the experience of a small, purposive sample of people. It did not invite extensive, in-depth comment from others such as colleagues, researchers or students outside the inquiry. Additionally, each of us were juggling professional and personal commitments alongside this research. We engaged with the project according to our time constraints. This differential engagement resulted in variations in immersion into this inquiry topic by each of us.

Regardless of these limitations, the project has a number of strengths as it provides an opportunity to review extant literature, share perceptions, and observations, and to develop our knowledge about the role of individual and collective case study within our practice, teaching and research. The limitations did not limit the richness of this research experience; the opportunity to describe, critique and contribute to theoretical and experiential knowledge about the power of the case study, or the ability to make recommendations.

In light of the above inquiry, we recommend that practitioners, supervisors, researchers, and managers:

1. be reflexive and reflective in their use of the individual and collective case study within all contexts;
2. consider being *thinking, doing and being* professionals who are intentional about when and why they use a case study approach; and
3. remember the power associated with a case study.

CONCLUSION

We, via this study, invite others to join us in contemplating the use of the case study method within the human service environment. This includes considering how the case study can be an effective way of meaning-making that enhances personal and professional development and knowledge within practice, education including work-based learning and research. Such meaning-making appears possible because the case study turns quantitative data and conversations into simulated, active, transformational and memorable learning. Through this inquiry, we became aware that investigations into, and literature about, the case study often focus on research applications and under-reports the functionality of the case study. We noted that the case study can be utilised within a workplace with little contemplation about why it is used or its value or power. The literature does not highlight how the case study promotes an intentional verbal conversation, such as within field education, opening up the faculty to wonder. The case study can scaffold staff training and development, field education activities and organisational activities such as research, reports, funding applications, networking activities, recruitment and advertisements. In our experience, the application of a case study elicits humanity within the human services. It sparks empathy, reflexivity and reflection. We realise its functionality makes the case study a valuable and powerful tool for learning, practice and research.

References

- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). (2010). *Code of ethics*. Canberra, ACT: Author.
- Adamson, C. (2011). Getting the balance right: Critical reflection, knowledge and the social work curriculum. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education*, 13(1), 22–34.
- Agllias, K., Bowles, W., Cassano, B., Collingridge, M., Dawood, A., Irwin, J., ... Zubrzycki, J. (2010). *A guide to supervision in social work field education*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- AHC Media. (2016). Case studies clarify social, behavioral risks. Retrieved from <http://www.ahcmedia.com/articles/17247-case-studies-clarify-social-behavioral-risks>

- Alston, M., & Bowles, W. (2013). *Research for social workers* (3rd ed.). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Ansombe, B. (2001). Not either/or but both/and: An academic/field partnership in practice. *Australian Social Work, 54*(4), 19–27.
- Archer, M. S. (2010). Routine, reflexivity and realism. *Sociological Theory, 28*(3), 272–303.
- Australian Public Service Commission. (2012). Performance management. Retrieved from <http://www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/state-of-the-service/2011-12-sosr/08-performance-management>
- Baldwin, M. (2006). Working together, learning together: The role of co-operative inquiry in the development of complex practice by teams of social workers. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research: Concise paperback edition* (pp. 221-227). London/City, UK: Sage.
- Baskarada, S. (2014). Qualitative case study guidelines. *The Qualitative Report: How to report, 24*, 1–18.
- Beres, L., Bowles, K., & Fook, J. (2011). Narrative therapy and critical reflection on practice: A conversation with Jan Fook. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 30*(2), 81–97.
- Bernard, R. (2012). Case study and professional development in the education of students at the child welfare program. *European Journal of Social Education (22–23)*, 52–59.
- Bridges, D., & McGee, S. (2010). Collaborative inquiry: Process, theory and ethics. In J. Higgs, N. Cherry, R. Macklin & R. Ajjawi (Eds.), *Researching practice: A discourse on qualitative methodologies* (pp. 257–268). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Budgell, B. (2008). Guidelines to the writing of case studies. *Journal of the Canadian Chiropractic Association, 52*(4), 199–204. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2597880/>
- Calma, T. (2008). The role of social workers as human rights workers with Indigenous people and communities. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/role-social-workers-human-rights-workers-Indigenous-people-and-communities>
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 11*(100). doi:10.1186/1471-2288-11-100
- D’Cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2006). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *British Journal of Social Workers, 2007*(37), 73–90.
- Davys, A., & Beddoe, L. (2009). The reflective learning model: supervision of social work students. *Social Work Education, 28*(8), 919–933.
- Dirkx, J. (2006). Engaging emotions in adult learning: A Jungian perspective on emotion and transformative learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109*(Spring 2006), 15–26. doi:10.1002/ace
- EY. (2016). Government and public human service sectors. Retrieved from <http://www.ey.com/AU/en/Industries/Government---Public-Sector/Government-and-Public-Sector-Human-services>
- Fook, J. (2012). *Social work: A critical approach to practice* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Fook, J., & Askeland, G. A. (2007). Challenges of critical reflection: “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” *Social Work Education, 26*(5), 520–533.
- Foneris, S. G., & Peden-McAlpine, C. (2016). Evaluation of a reflective learning intervention to improve critical thinking in novice nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 57*(4), 410–421.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Giles, R., Epstein, I., & Rhodes, D. (2011). Introduction. In R. Giles, I. Epstein, & A. Vertigan (Eds.), *Clinical data mining in an allied health organisation: A real world experience* (pp. 1–16). Sydney, NSW: Sydney University Press.
- Gray, M. (2007). The not so critical “critical reflection.” *Australian Social Work, 60*(2), 131–135.
- Gursansky, D., Quinn, D., & Sueur, E. L. (2010). Authenticity in reflection: Building reflective skills for social work. *Social Work Education, 29*(7), 788–791.
- Healy, J., Tillotson, N., Short, M., & Hearn, C. (2015). Social work field education: Believing in supervisors who are living with disabilities. *Disability and Society, 30*(7), 1087–1102.
- Healy, K. (2014). *Social work theories in context: Creating frameworks for practice*. London, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Howard, A. (2009). *Language, practice and power: The emergence of asset based community development (ABCD) on the Central Coast of New South Wales, Australia*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sydney, NSW.

- Jones, K. (2005). Widening the lens: The efficacy of the case method in helping direct practice MSW students understand and apply mezzo and macro dimensions of practice. *Social Work Education, 24*(2), 197–211.
- Jones, K. A., & Russell, S. (2008). Using case method teaching and student-written cases to improve students' ability to incorporate theory into practice. *Journal of Teaching in the Addictions, 6*(1), 35–47.
- Jones-Mutton, T. (2011). Case management and intensive support practice. In H. Barton, M. Short, & T. Jones-Mutton (Eds.), *Engaging with the community: Real people, real lives, real stories* (pp. 62–71). Wagga Wagga, NSW: Charles Sturt University.
- Jones-Mutton, T., Short, M., Bidgood, T., & Jones, T. (2015). Field education: Off-site social work supervision in rural, regional and remote Australia. *Advances in Social Work & Welfare Education, 17*(1), 83–97.
- Kessl, F. (2009). Critical reflexivity, social work, and the emerging European post-welfare states. *European Journal of Social Work, 12*(3), 305–317.
- Leggett, N., & Ford, M. (2013). A fine balance: Understanding the roles educators and children play as intentional teachers and intentional learners within the Early Years Learning Framework. Retrieved from <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/australasian-journal-early-childhood/index-abstracts/ajec-vol-38-4-2013/1850-2/>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods source book*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Myer Foundation. (2016). *Grants case studies*. Retrieved from <http://myerfoundation.org.au/grants/education/case-studies/>
- Oates, B. (2002). Co-operative inquiry: Reflections on practice. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, 1*(1), 27–37.
- Pawar, M. (2004). Social policy curricula for training social workers: Towards a model. *Australian Social Work, 57*(1), 3–18.
- Pawar, M., & Ancombe, B. (2015). *Reflective social work practice: Thinking, doing and being*. Melbourne, VIC: Cambridge University Press.
- Plath, D. (2014). Implementing evidence based practice: An organisational perspective. *The British Journal of Social Work, 44*, 905–923.
- QSR International. (2014). Nvivo 10 for windows: Getting started. Retrieved from <http://download.qsrinternational.com/Document/NVivo10/NVivo10-Getting-Started-Guide.pdf>
- Radley, A., & Chamberlain, K. (2011). The study of the case: Conceptualising case study research. *Journal of Community and Applied Psychology* [online] (22), 390–399.
- Reason, P., & Heron, J. (2013). *A short guide to co-operative inquiry*. Retrieved from www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm
- Saldanha, G., & O'Brien, S. (2013). *Research methodologies in translation studies*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Short, M. (2015). Three Anglican churches engaging with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Sydney, NSW: Bush Church Aid.
- Short, M., Broughton, G., Short, M., Ochala, Y., & Ancombe, B. (2017). Connecting to belonging: A cross-disciplinary inquiry into rural Australian Anglican church engagements with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 32*(1), 119–133.
- Short, M., & Healy, J. (2017). Writing 'with' not 'about': Examples in Co-operative Inquiry In S. Gair & A. V. Luyun (Eds.), *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives*. London: Routledge.
- Silverman, D. (2010). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Silverman, R., & Patterson, K. (2015). *Qualitative research methods for community development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Simon, J. L. (2009). *The art of empirical investigation*. New Brunswick, Canada: Transaction Publishers.
- Swanborn, P. (2010). *Case study research: What, why and how?* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- The Guardian*. (2016). A guide to writing effective funding applications. Retrieved from <https://knowhownonprofit.org/funding/fundraising/grants-funds-and-corporate-fundraising/writing>
- Thomas, C. (2011). *The research utilisation nexus: Putting research into practice: an examination of research utilisation in a child welfare practice context in New South Wales* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Sydney University, Sydney. Retrieved from <http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/8406>
- Victorian Government Youth Central. (2014). Assessment centres. Retrieved from <http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/jobs-careers/applying-for-jobs/assessment-centres>

Using Practice Research as a Strategy for Developing Academic Workforce Capacity

Joan Rapaport and Jill Manthorpe

Joan Rapaport, PhD, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London
Jill Manthorpe, MA, Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London

Address for Correspondence:

jill.manthorpe@kcl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

There is interest in developing social work research capacity in many countries and one route to this is to encourage practitioners to undertake doctoral studies. This paper discusses a case study of undertaking mental health research at doctoral level while in practice and sets this in the context of other forms of research-related workforce development. In doing so, it touches on the potential for social workers to demonstrate leadership as “natural researchers” and “active researchers.”

Keywords: *Practice research; Social work; Capacity; Case study*

BACKGROUND

In the United Kingdom (UK) there are small, but growing, opportunities for social work doctoral research (see Manthorpe & Moriarty, 2016) although many of these require full-time commitment to study. For many social workers in practice, however, this level of dedication is a challenging expectation, and even part-time study on top of a full-time clinical role or practice responsibilities, not surprisingly, possibly deters potential students. Practice research initiatives which mentor students at the interface of practice and research provide opportunities to maximize the use of practice to further research aims (Joubert, 2006; Joubert & Epstein, 2013).

There have been several initiatives to foster practitioner-led research in the UK (Shaw, Lunt & Mitchell, 2014) although many of these are small in scale and do not lead to a doctorate or a postgraduate award. Indeed, research skills may not be seen as priorities for professional development. The Workforce Capacity Planning Model (Skills for Care, 2014) was designed to help employers analyse their workforce capacity and to make informed decisions about the numbers of workers with the right skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of the Care Act 2014 in England. The model places “[p]erson centred assessment, care and support” (p.8) and “engaged and innovative workers” (p.8) at centre stage. However, whilst it highlighted and listed helpful questions to achieve these ends, the document failed to identify a potential role for empirical research. Is this omission acceptable or a major oversight in terms of research leadership in social work? This question is examined with reference to a PhD study conducted by a social work practitioner between 1995 and 2002 (Rapaport, 2012).

The Study

The PhD study (hereafter referred to as the “Nearest Relative” study) explored the role of the nearest relative under the Mental Health Act 1983 that still survives under the Mental Health Act 2007. The nearest relative is a specific legal designation identified by a legal hierarchy with assigned powers governing a close relative’s hospital detention and discharge. The Act also defined the duties of the Approved Social Worker (ASW) (since superseded by the Approved Mental Health Practitioner) to consult nearest relatives and patients. The research was exploratory and used the comparative case study approach. Homogeneous groups of mental health carers (family or relatives), service users and ASWs were interviewed. What stakeholders thought about the role was central to the research but the PhD was informed throughout by contemporary practice experience. Indeed it was practice experience that helped formulate the questions the research was designed to answer. ASWs had reported difficulties when apparently unsuitable nearest relatives seemed to be abusing their powers. They further identified weaknesses in the system enabling the courts to legally displace “problem relatives” (Mental Health Act Commission, 1991).

This practice-focused doctoral study revealed that, contrary to widely held views, nearest relatives (instead of the ASW) did very occasionally take on the responsibility of signing the legal order to detain a close relative in hospital. It also found, due to funding constraints and problems accessing professional interpreters, that ASWs were sometimes obliged to involve a family relative as translator when seeking a non-English-speaking nearest relative’s opinion about the patient’s condition to inform the mental health assessment. This was a major concern given the issues of liberty at stake and the ASW’s duty to be sure that the views of the

nearest relative were being transmitted rather than those of the translator relative. If the patient was also unable to speak English, using a relative to translate his or her account would be far from ideal as the ASW would have no way of knowing whether the patient's views were being faithfully recorded. However, more generally, family members and also patients (using the legal term) were totally unaware of the nearest relative role and its legal powers but, whilst they quickly recognised problems with the identification process, they could also appreciate the role's safeguarding potential to prevent unnecessary hospital detention.

The practice focus of the research led to practical outcomes (as well as a thesis), such as informing an accessible nearest relative information leaflet (which did not exist at the time of the study). The study's literature review and findings contributed substantially to a nationally funded research project about carers and confidentiality in mental health settings (Service Delivery and Organisation, 2006). The findings also highlighted the value of carer and practitioner alliances, transferable to other situations, and how, whilst practitioners can support family carers, by so doing family carers can, in return, also help practitioners. A core theory of reciprocal role valorisation based on social role valorisation principles was developed. Theoretical development that frames practitioner performance was a major outcome of the Nearest Relative study which had a major impact on the practitioner/researcher's own development.

Social Workers as “Natural” Researchers

By its nature, social work is deeply embedded in law, politics and social values. This suggests that social workers are arguably well placed to investigate the likely factors, such as attitudes and knowledge base which influence the use of legislation, including the Mental Health Act and more generally, govern human actions or behaviour. Grounded theory has developed a highly sophisticated system for analysis of such data which may at first blush seem formidable. However, many, if not most, social workers during their work, and often also during their training, have experiences of mulling over a client's/service user's behaviour and asking themselves: What lies behind this? When does it occur? Is it constant or are there times of change? What are the consequences flowing from the pattern or patterns of these behaviours? These types of questions which concern the dynamics that influence people's thinking and associated behaviours are very much in line with the coding paradigm of the mid-stages of grounded theory analysis.

As the Nearest Relative PhD incorporated some similar techniques, albeit to compare and contrast individual and group situations, such approaches are likely to be very accessible to social worker researchers. Interviewing, putting people at their ease, making observations and recording are, of course, core social work skills, which can readily be adapted for research purposes. This potentially positions social workers therefore as “naturals” in the research space, using well-honed interviewing skills in a different research context. At the same time, research training provides the opportunity for social workers to understand and manage appropriately the “insider” research role (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010) when undertaking research into practice.

Social Workers as “Active” Researchers

For some practitioners, research interests may be shared, or at least there is a commonly shared ambition to make more immediate application to practice. There are now several types of Action Research-type initiatives (Moxley, 2013). Taking one example, Beddoe and Harrington (2012) described a project referred to as Growing Research in Practice (GRIP). GRIP explored the challenge of enhancing the research capability and confidence of groups of social workers in Auckland, New Zealand. Practitioners, including managers and academics, worked closely together in partnership. Their prime objective was to discover participants’ views about the effectiveness of an innovative scheme to instruct and mentor the participants in the research process, in an effort to reduce some of the barriers to social work involvement in practice-based research. Qualitative methods, such as individual and group interviews, regular discussions, evaluations and debriefing activities – the bread and butter of social work – were used to collect data. In terms of outcomes, whilst managing time was undeniably a significant factor, positive findings included the enjoyment derived from participating in the research process, the potential to enhance social work and opportunities for personal learning and development. This kind of research involvement also provides an important context for discussions about career development. For example, Beddoe and Harrington (2012) report that there was clear evidence that some participants had been able to use their knowledge for a variety of purposes including changing programmes or practices and as a means to seek funding for further lines of inquiry. Shifts in organisational culture, improved collaborative working and opportunities to educate and involve others were also reported. Action Research studies, such as that led by Fern (2014), also detect practitioner, agency and service delivery benefits.

The importance of developing practice-based social work theory to strengthen the profession resurfaces frequently in professional circles (McClean, 2012) and Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is a longstanding UK government objective. Whilst a PhD is a major undertaking and costly in terms of time and money, Action Research may be a more accessible alternative. It is problem-focused and based on a cyclical process in which research, action and interaction are interlinked. It is a strategy for enquiry, development and change, is closely linked to practice and can be undertaken by practitioners and service users alike. It comfortably accommodates approaches familiar to practitioners and readily meets the social work ideals of service user empowerment. For social workers in research-receptive employment this may be one way forward rather than the lonely path of traditional doctoral study. In the UK there is also a small but growing interest in professional doctorates (Manthorpe & Moriarty, 2016) but data on these are not collected and the wider outcomes not known.

CONCLUSIONS

Practitioners may feel hard pressed in busy practice environments, but live research can be enjoyable and has the potential to enrich practice and enhance disciplinary leadership. It can also create career opportunities that move beyond practice into areas of research that are then informed by a valuable practice knowledge base and experience.

Perhaps ironically, by the time the doctorate was finished, the PhD student in the Nearest Relative study had, of necessity, left her social services post, needing more time in which to

complete the thesis. She was subsequently invited to work on a research project about carers and confidentiality jointly managed by Rethink and the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London (KCL). A year later she was appointed to the Social Care Workforce Research Unit also at KCL where she worked on several projects including those investigating topics such as advocacy, Mental Capacity Act implementation and adult safeguarding, bringing a valuable first-hand practice perspective but also research skills in literature reviewing, interviewing and analysis, and knowledge of dissemination realities. The PhD led to several additional publications (Rapaport, 2003, 2004, 2005; Rapaport & Manthorpe, 2009) and others arising out of the research Unit's work programme. Although these post-PhD opportunities were much valued, the student's main disappointment was being unable to return to social work as a "Dr" social worker to use her new-found confidence in multi-disciplinary discussions as local opportunities were not available. Whilst able to apply her PhD knowledge as an appointed lay or specialist member of the Mental Health Review Tribunal, she would have liked to have had the chance to implement her research findings to enhance the quality of her social work practice. This illustrates an important opportunity that can be missed for PhD-qualified social workers to bring high-level academic expertise back into practice in ways that advance social work as a discipline. In addition to benefiting practice systems, given the far-reaching potential of higher degree study to enhance the quality of practice by either direct or more strategic means, doctoral study may also be an important way of developing workforce capacity. We posed the question at this start of this brief article as to whether the omission of research is acceptable or a major oversight in terms of research leadership in social work. We have suggested, on the basis of our experiences, that in the workforce planning documents such as those from Skills for Care (2014), cited earlier, research in practice should be more clearly highlighted. This also creates leadership opportunities within and beyond social work.

References

- Beddoe, L., & Harington, P. (2012). One step in a thousand-mile journey: Can civic practice be nurtured in practitioner research? Reporting on an innovative project. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 74–93.
- Costley, C., Elliott, G., & Gibbs, P. (2010). *Doing work based research: Approaches to enquiry for insider-researchers*. London, UK: Sage.
- Fern, E. (2014). Child-directed social work practice: Findings from an action research study conducted in Iceland. *British Journal of Social Work, 44*(5) 1110–1128.
- Joubert, L. (2006) Academic–practice partnerships in practice research: A cultural shift for health social workers. *Social Work in Health Care, 43*(2/3) 151–161.
- Joubert, L., & Epstein, I. (2013). Editorial. [Special Edition: Current themes in health social work practice research]. Academic/practice partnerships at the University of Melbourne. *Social Work in Health Care, 52*(2-3) 105–109.
- Maclean, S. (with Collins, P., Dean, A., Moore, S., & Tucker, G.). (2012). The food of good practice. July/August, *Professional Social Work*.
- Manthorpe, J., & Moriarty, J. (2016). *Social work research with adults: The state we're in*. London, UK: Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King's College London. Retrieved from <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/Social-work-research-with-adults-in-England---the-state-were-in.pdf>
- Mental Health Act Commission. (1991). *Mental Health Act Commission, 4th biennial report*. London, UK: Mental Health Act Commission.
- Moxley, D. P. (2013). Action research. In C. Franklin (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Social Work*, New York, National Association of Social Workers Press and Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.83

Rapaport, J. (2003). The ghost of the nearest relative under the Mental Health Act 1983 – past, present and future. *Journal of Mental Health Law*, July, 51–65.

Rapaport, J. (2004). A matter of principle: The nearest relative under the Mental Health Act 1983 and proposals for legislative reform. *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 26(4), 377–396.

Rapaport, J. (2005). The informal caring experience: Issues and dilemmas. In & (Eds.), *Mental health at the crossroads. The promise of the psychosocial approach* (pp. 155–170). London, UK: Routledge.

Rapaport, J., & Manthorpe, J. (2009). Fifty years on. The legacy of the Percy Report. *Journal of Social Work*, 9(3), 251–267.

Rapaport, J. (2012). *Reflections on “a relative affair”: The nearest relative under the Mental Health Act 1983*. London, UK: Social Care Workforce Research Unit, King’s College London. Retrieved from <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/sshm/scwru/pubs/2012/reports/rapaport2012reflections.pdf>

Service Delivery and Organisation. (2006). *Briefing Paper. Sharing mental health information with carers: Pointers to good practice for service providers*. London, UK. Retrieved from www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk/carershtmHASHhuxley

Shaw, I., Lunt, N., & Mitchell, F. (2014). *Practitioner research in social care: A review and recommendations*. London, UK: NIHR School for Social Care Research. Retrieved from <http://www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk/PDF/MR/MR18.pdf>

Skills for Care. (2014). *Workforce capacity planning model*. Leeds, UK: Skills for Care. Retrieved from <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Document-library/Standards/Care-Act/workforce-capacity-planning-model-september-2014.pdf>

Field Education: Strengthening the Evidence Base

Dr. Nicole Hill

Nicole Hill, PhD, Lecturer, The University of Melbourne

Address for Correspondence:

hilln@unimelb.edu.au

ABSTRACT

Field education is integral to the professional education of social work students preparing to enter the profession. Despite its importance, and the emphasis on evidence-informed practice in the wider social work curriculum, the evidence base that informs the quality and effectiveness of this core component of training is varied. This brief article describes the beginning stages of a program of research to utilise anonymised administrative data to better understand student experiences, pathways, progress and performance in social work field education. It is argued that informing the evidence base through better utilisation of administrative data has the potential to strengthen program and curriculum development.

Keywords: *Social work field education; Social work placements; Evidence base; Administrative data; Aggregated data*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of field education in the social work curriculum is undisputed (Bogo, 2015; CSWE, 2008; Domakin, 2014; Gursanski & LeSueur, 2011; Holden, Barker, Rosenberg, Kuppens, & Ferrell, 2011; Wayne, Bogo & Raskin, 2010). Similar to other professions (such as medicine, nursing, law), field education provides students with an opportunity to practise the skills they learn in the classroom and socializes them to the many complexities of the profession. In a very real way, fieldwork is the primary vehicle that the social work profession has for establishing and testing the competence of its graduates.

Organizations and practitioners that establish field placements also benefit substantially by providing fieldwork opportunities for students. The partnership that develops between organizations and the University can result in significant support and expertise on research and professional development activities. Placements can also be a cost-effective mechanism for future workforce recruitment. For the individual practitioner, it offers a pathway for skills development and experiential learning in the areas of professional supervision and leadership, both of which are critical skill sets for individual career advancement and for building organizational capability.

A high quality and effective fieldwork program has at least three key components: strategic community engagement; teaching and learning; and research and scholarly leadership (see Figure 1). Whilst many schools of social work focus a great deal of energy and might excel in operational aspects of the field education program (particularly in the first and second components of strategic engagement and teaching), there is often too little strategic focus placed on the research–practice nexus.

Figure 1. Components of a Fieldwork Program



This is not to suggest that scholarly research is not occurring in field education. Indeed, it has been postulated that field education has consumed a greater research focus than any other aspect of the social work curriculum (Bogo, 2015). Despite this emerging evidence base, much of the research that has been undertaken is generally qualitative and exploratory in nature. While undoubtedly important to the development of knowledge in field education, qualitative research however, provides only part of the picture of social work education. Furthermore, many of these research studies have been undertaken by individual programs or report on individual projects (Bogo, 2015). In comparison, relatively little systematic research, including cross-institutional work, has been undertaken. In turn, the profession's capacity to generalize these findings and enhance the empirical base with which to improve its quality and effectiveness to inform future program and curriculum development has been limited (Bogo, 2015; Holden et al., 2011).

This places limitations on the development of innovation within field education programs and creates a poor evidence base for the review of educational practice standards in this area. Karger (2012) discusses these dilemmas as they relate more broadly to social work education, stating that, as a result of the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) not collating or releasing data on social work education to the public domain, institutions lack empirical data on the status of social work education in Australia. They state "informed discussions about social work education cannot be made without hard data; nor can the profession adapt to changing trends without valid data on social work education" (Karger, 2012, p. 323).

Additionally, social work field education programs are facing an uncertain future in terms of the sustainability of current placement arrangements. Faced with competing demands of increasing student enrolments and increasing workforce demand pressures that affect placement offerings (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012; Karger, 2012), evidence-based practices are required to maximize the efficiency and sustainability of social work field education programs. Historically, there has been paucity and a lack of emphasis on evidence-informed practice in field education in Australia. With the formation in recent years of the National Field Education Network (NFEN), this context of evidence-informed practice is changing. While still in its infancy, the Network has identified and actioned a number of research priorities to further advance the professional and pedagogical evidence base of field education (Rollins et al., in press).

This brief article describes the beginning stages of a program of research to utilise anonymised administrative data to better understand student experiences, pathways, progress and performance in social work field education. It is argued that informing the evidence base through strategic utilisation of existing administrative data has the potential to strengthen program and curriculum development, while overcoming some of the commonly reported barriers to evidence-implementation (Mullen, Shlonsky, Bledsoe, & Bellamy, 2005).

Administrative Datasets as Quality Improvement Strategy in Field Education Research

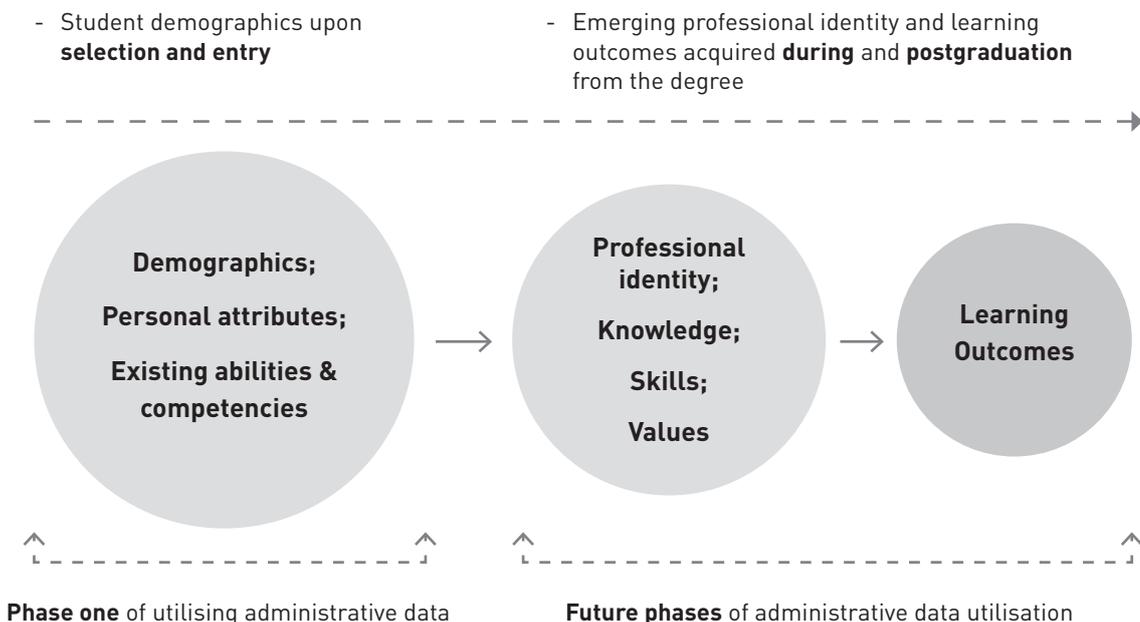
Continuous quality improvement has been defined by Lorch and Pollak as "an iterative process of: planning to improve a product or process, plan implementation, analyzing and comparing results against those expected, and corrective action on difference between actual and expected results" (2014, pp. e97066). Simultaneous advances in computer science and engineering have led to the institution of information management systems

in social care, medicine, education, crime and justice, and virtually every other human services sector. Applying an information management system, as a continuous quality improvement strategy that utilises existing field education administrative datasets would offer unprecedented opportunities to both better understand student learning pathways, and identify the factors and processes in field education that either support or inhibit positive student learning outcomes.

Motivated by these possibilities, in 2014, the University of Melbourne hosted an international workshop to discuss the development of a dynamic, outcome-focused, longitudinal database that would enable within- and across-systems research in social work field education. Field academics from five countries congregated at the University and engaged in two days of collaborative research discussions.

The first day was focused on introducing participants to the contextual background of this program of research, and collectively brainstorming the benefits and uses for such a collaborative database in field education. The second day was dedicated to developing a research prototype that would have international applicability and relevance across field education programs, while simultaneously giving consideration to the challenges this work would likely incur.

The energy and enthusiasm that academic participants exhibited for this workshop were immense. Participants clearly wanted to know more about what students bring to placement, what they experience and what learning outcomes they achieve. Inevitably, tensions existed with respect to whether aggregated administrative data can actually provide answers to some of these questions. Working within the scope of what a research database can realistically achieve, as a first phase, it was agreed that students' demographic data and understanding what we can through existing administrative records was a realistic place to start. Figure 2 presents a visual representation of this phased planned approach to utilising administrative data in field education research.

Figure 2. A Phased Approach to Utilising Administrative Data in Field Education Research**Utilising administrative data to analyse:**

Moving beyond demographic data, discussions regarding other ways in which administrative data could potentially be utilised in field education research focused on specific aspects of the field education curriculum and the processes through which this curriculum is delivered. These were grouped into the following discrete information categories:

- field educator related information (e.g., years of experience in role; years of experience in providing field education supervision, details of supervision training received; demographics; and perhaps preferred theoretical orientation);
- placement agency related information (e.g., field of practice, type and size of agency, metro/rurally based; target client group; services provided);
- academic performance related student information (e.g., academic achievements; academic progress issues; break in studies such as leave of absence); and
- student placement profile and placement allocation-related information (e.g., first or final placement student; learning goals; type of supervision received; full-time/part-time status).

Some of these foci, such as student placement profile and placement-allocation-relation information are planned for inclusion in the first phase of the research design. The other areas will be planned for inclusion in future phases of the research program. During these discussions, there was an increasing awareness and consensus among the workshop participants that utilising administrative data held by universities has the potential to expand our understanding of student demographics, their educational journey, and the inter-relationship of students' skills and knowledge acquisition with specific curriculum component and learning activities.

Challenges with Administrative Data in Field Education Research

A number of challenges became readily apparent as the workshops' discussions progressed; three primary challenges were articulated by the majority of participants. Firstly, while all field education programs keep administrative data, the type of data and the methods by which it is recorded differed quite significantly between participants' institutions. For example, some participants reported their programs used specialized placement software programs that guided their administrative records (e.g., InPlace or Sonia) while other participants' programs used manual data recording via Excel. Different legislations and registration requirements between countries also inform what data must be recorded.

Secondly, the degree of effort to advance a research agenda in field education is often compromised by the operational demands of a busy placement program. In such a resource-intensive part of the curriculum, typically any additional resources allocated to field programs are invested in the operational running of the program as opposed to being prioritized for research or scholarly endeavours. Thirdly, logistical issues were raised regarding the most effective way to communicate and hold together a diverse group of field programs in a collaborative research program such as this.

Finally, a number of ethical challenges were discussed during the workshop: primarily these related to intellectual property; privacy and security issues of sharing and storing data; and the process by which student and institutional program data would be de-identified to a level that was appropriate to share, but remain relevant to the topic under study. Issues of consent were also discussed, at both an individual student level of consent and institutional level to share and use their data for research purposes. Notwithstanding some of the challenges in undertaking collaborative research, there was a high level of enthusiasm to engage across international borders and to advance knowledge using administrative data.

Phase One: A Proof of Concept

The planning and facilitation of the two-day workshop constituted the primary origins of this program of research. Since the workshop, the project team has continued to work through the challenges associated with the project. As part of the first research phase, a proof of concept study is under way to ascertain if, indeed, the challenges associated with using administrative data and sharing program placement and student-related data within and across institutions can be resolved.

This proof of concept study is being undertaken in Victoria, and is focused on research questions relating to placement allocation and supervisory arrangements across various fields of practice. Simplistic in its design, i.e., data-mining existing administrative records of field education programs across one calendar year, the outcomes of this study will have relevance to a number of stakeholders involved in the placement process:

- It will provide information to each field education program on where their placements were sourced in a one-year period; and budgetary information relating to practice settings that require external supervision arrangements or payment for clinical placements.

- It will provide information regarding what types of supervisory and reflective practice models operate for students in different practice settings.
- It will provide, to the AASW, information and evidence regarding the many varied supervision models that operate across placement practice settings, thus challenging the traditional sole requirement of face-to-face supervision.

Once this concept has been tested in the local context, precedents will have been established that will guide the ethical protocols of using and sharing institutional administrative data for research purposes. Testing these ideas first at the local level will support collaborations that can be safely and effectively established nationally and then internationally as the project develops. It is the spirit of cross-institutional collaboration and a shared vision of enhancing the empirical evidence base of field education that will permit the future phases of administrative data utilisation planned in this program of research to be realized.

CONCLUSION

In an era where the sustainability of current social work field education program placement arrangements are being questioned, a dearth of evidence exists as to what actually constitutes an effective model to maximize the efficiency and sustainability of social work field education programs. Alongside this increasing instability of placement arrangements are the competing operational demands of pressured field education programs that can compromise the capacity of field education staff to engage in research practices.

This program of research promotes a way forward that seeks to bridge these competing demands – that is to strengthen the evidence base by utilising existing field education administrative datasets. The proof of concept study being undertaken in phase one will establish precedents around data sharing and privacy protocols, and will pave the way for future collaboration. Utilising existing datasets in this way as a method of continuous quality improvement within field education offers unprecedented opportunities to enhance the empirical base and inform future program and curriculum development.

References

- Bogo, M. (2015). Field education for clinical social work practice: Best practices and contemporary challenges. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 43(3), 317–324.
- CSWE. (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standards*. Alexandria, VIC: Council on Social Work Education.
- Domakin, A. (2014). Are we making the most of learning from the practice placement? *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, 33(6), 718–730. doi:10.1080/02615479.2013.869315
- Gursansky, D., & Le Sueur, E. (2012). Conceptualising field education in the twenty-first century: Contradictions, challenges and opportunities. *Social Work Education*, 31, 914–931.
- Holden, G., Barker, K., Rosenberg, G., Kuppens, S., & Ferrell, L. W. (2011). The signature pedagogy of social work? An investigation of the evidence. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 21(3), 363–372.
- Lorch, J. A., & Pollak, V. E. (2014). *Continuous quality improvement in daily clinical practice: A proof of concept study*. PLoS ONE, 9(5), e97066–11. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0097066
- Karger, H. (2012). Lessons from American social work education: Caution ahead. *Australian Social Work*, 65(3), 311–325.

Mullen, E., Shlonsky, A., Bledsoe, S. E., & Bellamy, J. L. (2005). From concept to implementation: Challenges facing evidence-based social work. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 1(1), 61–84.

Rollins, W., Egan, R., Zuchowski, I., Duncan, M., Chee, P., Muncey, P., ... Higgins, M. (in press). Leading through collaboration: The national field education network. *Advances in Social Work*.

Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2010). Field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education: Congruence and disparity. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(3), 327–339.

Democratising and decolonising social work education: Opportunities for leadership

David McNabb

Lecturer, Unitec Institute of Technology, NZ

Address for Correspondence:

dmcnabb@unitec.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

Regulatory standards informing social work education reinforce the importance of inclusive practices and the promotion of human rights. This article considers the ways in which social work values of equity and self-determination can be operationalised in academic social work programmes. It argues that democratising and decolonising practices have the greatest potential to change the nature of social work education in ways that support self-determination and the promotion of equity.

INTRODUCTION

Issues of equity and the development of inclusive processes rest at the heart of social work. Regulatory frameworks across the world reinforce the commitment of social work to education that is based on social work values and principles, including giving effect to self-determination and promoting equity. Recent research has identified the importance of democratising and decolonising practices within the discipline's standards of practice in social work education. Through an analysis of the *Global Standards for the Training and Education of the Social Work Profession* (hereafter Global Standards) (IASSW & IFSW, 2004) and local standards across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, McNabb and Connolly (2017) found the Global Standards to be strong on issues of equity, participation and rights, and that these areas represent a key focus of global influence and leadership. In drawing upon elements of Shapiro's (2011) democratic theory, the study found that the Global Standards have an important role in democratising social work education through the reinforcement of equity issues. The strong focus on service-user participation within the Global Standards was found to be a key area that local standards in Australasia could better reinforce and, in so doing, more strongly influence practice at the local level. Interestingly, by comparison the study found that the local standards demonstrated leadership in the furtherance of Indigenous rights and concerns, something that the Global Standards might note and better incorporate in a future review. This does perhaps illustrate the locally specific nature of expressions of self-determination and the imperatives this presents at the country level. The author suggests that this mix of global and local leadership in the reinforcement of democratising and decolonising ideas would more fully align and reflect the social work profession's fundamental principles and values.

Whilst standards undoubtedly aspire to reinforce the values of social work, there has been limited research globally on how the commitment to democratisation, decolonisation and addressing equity issues has been implemented within social work education, including if, and how, it might influence future practice. This raises questions for social work educators in operationalising this commitment with respect to programmatic delivery. In this short article I argue that leaders in social work education are bound by an ethical commitment, as all social workers are, to find a way to operationalise social work values in the delivery of their academic programmes (Webster, McNabb, & Darroch, 2015, p. 45).

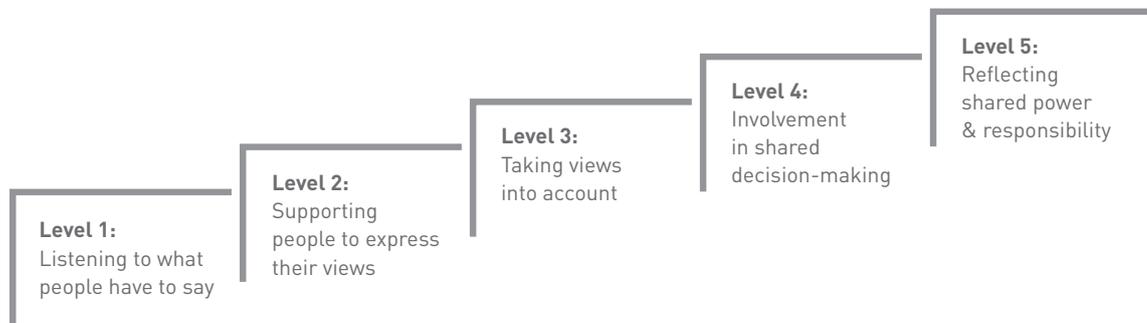
Democratising Practices in Social Work Education

Service user participation is an integral part of the Global Standards and should be evidenced in all dimensions of the programme, and across the points where service users may engage with a school. Service users are those people who are consumers of public social work services. Their participation should also be evidenced in the school's involvement with the regulatory social work bodies and may also include carer participation.

According to Shapiro (2011), principles of participation are an important part of an effective civil society. This involves the maximisation of stakeholder participation in collective life and matters that concern them, thus guarding against the domination of single interests. Drawing upon these ideas from a programme-delivery perspective invites opportunities for greater service user participation in social work education programmes. Involving service users in the classroom is, of course, not a new idea and when they share

their experiences in this way it can be powerful for student learning. Student experience of being public service users can also be privileged in the classroom. This type of service-user involvement, however, does not necessarily engage them in higher levels of participation, for example, co-designing social work education from a service user perspective, or having a real say in what is taught and how it is taught.

Figure 1: Levels of citizen participation (Shier, 2001)



Shier (2001) has developed a useful five-level model of participation, and although it was created to enhance children's involvement in decision-making, it can also be usefully adapted to other areas of citizen participation. Adapting this to service user involvement in social work education, at the very basic level of participation, service users would be listened to (see Figure 1). This is followed by service users being supported to express their views – the sharing of experience in the classroom could be seen as an example of this level of participation. The third level of participation is where service users' views are taken into account, for example, educators might decide to incorporate service user perspectives into course content. Levels four and five arguably reflect more meaningful participation where service users have a real say in decision-making, and involvement in power sharing. In Aotearoa New Zealand the Social Workers Registration Board standards and its expectation of "Collaboration in programme development and review" (Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), 2016, 5.1, p. 7) suggests a level of active participation at levels four and five. How to engage service user representation in these higher levels of involvement in decision-making and power-sharing is something that academic programmes need to grapple with if they wish to move beyond simpler levels of service user involvement. In the local standards (in Aotearoa New Zealand) service users are specifically mentioned as an essential party as collaborators "in programme development and review" (SWRB, 2016, 5.1, p. 7), as important to the programme's stakeholder management plan and important attendees of regular meetings with stakeholders "to ensure that stakeholders' views are sought and considered" (2016, 5.2p. 7). This specificity about service user involvement does not limit further engagement, but positions regulatory expectations at a minimal level, arguably located at the lower levels of participation in Shier's model.

The UK approach, which has a tradition of user participation in social work, reinforces the importance of expecting higher-level service user involvement, and importantly providing the funding required to support it. This is noted in social work education policy where

separate funding is required to support service user and carer participation in programmes (The College of Social Work, 2012, p. 9). Leadership in the democratisation of social work academic programmes would see similar reinforcers of service user participation rights.

In addition to issues of democratisation, decolonising practices have also been an important feature of social work, particularly in countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

Decolonising Practices in Social Work Education

The global movement for decolonisation has found its formal expression in the United Nations (UN) decolonisation programme and in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) adopted in 2007 (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Decolonisation is the process of a colonised people releasing themselves from collective oppression and asserting their right to self-determination. Although the Global Standards do not have a specific focus on Indigenous rights and interests, broader global social work Indigenous policy has been expanded in the recently revised global social work definition (IFSW & IASSW, 2014) which included Indigenous knowledge as foundational, something that was previously absent in the definition. Social work from an international perspective supports Indigenous self-determination, and recognises this in the development of knowledge: “social work knowledges will be co-created and informed by Indigenous peoples” (IFSW & IASSW, 2014). It is pleasing to note that the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) has supported Indigenous representation through a membership policy where Aotearoa New Zealand has joint representation from both the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and from the Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association, the Indigenous representative body.

Colonised people have long fought colonisation and tokenistic participation and thinking. In Aotearoa New Zealand the social work profession has grappled with Indigenous rights and colonisation, including having a Standing Committee on Racism in the 1980s. The ANZASW constitution was revised in 1992 to include a commitment to undertake social work in accordance with the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand (Nash, 2001b, p. 41). In this document, Māori were recognised as first peoples, with subsequent rights. The notion of partnership was expressed within ANZASW by sharing governance between Māori and non-Māori beginning in the 1990s (McNabb, 2014, p. 65). In 1986 the NZ Council for Education and Training in the Social Services (NZCETSS) was established to govern social work education programmes. It had a structure of half Māori and half non-Māori membership with a strong commitment to social justice (Nash, 2001a).

In Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, the importance of decolonising practices in social work has been reinforced in the social work education standards (McNabb & Connolly, in press). The SWRB in Aotearoa New Zealand established a consultation process to further develop its policy concerning the standard of competence to practise social work with Māori which also relates to the graduate attribute to be able to work in a bicultural context and acknowledge the centrality of the Treaty. The draft policy named “Kaitiakitanga” was developed for this consultation process which prioritised engagement with Māori (SWRB, 2015) and led to a revised set of competency standards (SWRB, 2016). In Australia, the

social work education standards include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing as one of four essential core curriculum content areas (Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), 2012). This has been further developed with the publication of the teaching and learning framework *Getting it Right: Creating Partnerships for Change* which “is an evidence-informed road map for the development and delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in Australian social work curricula” (Zubrzycki et al., 2014, p. 5).

Introducing decolonising expectations in social work standards is, however, not quite the same as operationalising them in practice. Internationally, efforts have been made to operationalise a decolonising agenda in social work education introducing formal policies that have affirmed the link between the goal of indigenisation and fundamental social work values and principles (Morelli, Mataira, & Kaulukukui, 2013). This decolonising agenda integrated Indigenous cultural values in all aspects of academic activities within and beyond teaching within an academic programme. It saw, for example, the hosting of a global Indigenous-focused conference and the launch of an Indigenous-themed journal. Always privileging Indigenous voices, they targeted the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students and faculty, they taught Indigenous history and colonisation, Indigenous cultural competence, and they ensured a place for all students and staff to share their cultural stories. These activities, embraced within an integrated decolonising agenda and enduring over several years, provide an important illustration of leadership in the decolonising of social work education.

The extent to which decolonising practices are operationalised in Aotearoa New Zealand social work education is an important area of research. There are, however, two social work programmes based in Wānanga (Māori tertiary education providers) which demonstrate the strongest commitment to programme indigenisation. These are exciting developments that could also provide insight into the ways in which mainstream programmes might more strongly indigenise academic programmes.

CONCLUSION

This article has focused attention on the drivers for change in democratising and decolonising practices in social work education. Both are well grounded in social work values and principles and are reflected, in various degrees, across global and local social work education standards. While standards of social work education clearly do incorporate democratising and decolonising expectations, it could be argued that the regulatory bodies could nevertheless be more directive, providing a stronger driver for change.

Leaders in social work education are in a key position to advance democratising and decolonising agendas within academic programmes and at a collective level. It has been argued here that processes of meaningful service user participation are an important part of a democratising agenda. Although not touched on in this brief article, it has been noted in a fuller analysis, the ways in which students are essential stakeholders in social work education (McNabb & Connolly, 2017). Applying Shier’s model (see Figure 1) could be a useful means of testing the nature and extent of student and other service user participation within social work programmes.

With respect to decolonising practices, Indigenous social work educators have taken leadership in indigenising programmes but require strong support from non-Indigenous colleagues. There is, therefore, an important role for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators to support purposeful decolonising agendas. The Hawaiian experience described earlier (Morelli, Mataira, & Kaulukukui, 2013), is a good example of an attempt to develop an integrated set of activities that privilege Indigenous voices and experiences.

In many respects, leadership in social work education requires that we move beyond expectations of practice that are found in regulatory frameworks which are, by necessity, minimal in nature, toward a full integration of decolonising and democratising practices. It is these practices that have the greatest potential to change the nature of social work education in ways that support self-determination and the promotion of equity.

References

- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2012). Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) 2012 V1.4. Retrieved from <http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3550W>
- IASSW, & IFSW. (2004). Global standards for the training and education of the social work profession. Retrieved from http://cdn.ifsw.org/assets/ifsw_65044-3.pdf
- IFSW, & IASSW. (2014). Global definition of social work and commentary. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- McNabb, D. (2014). 30 years' membership and a 50th birthday – Where to next for ANZASW? *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review*, 26(2&3), 61–71.
- McNabb, D. J., & Connolly, M. (2017). The relevance of Global Standards to social work education in Australasia. *International Social Work*, 0(0), 1–13. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020872817710547>
doi:10.1177/0020872817710547
- Morelli, P. T., Mataira, P. J., & Kaulukukui, C. M. (2013). Indigenizing the curriculum: The decolonization of social work education in Hawai'i. In T. Hetherington, M. Gray, J. Coates, & M. Y. Bird (Eds.), *Decolonizing social work* (pp. 207–222). Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Nash, M. (2001a). Educating social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. In M. Connolly (Ed.), *New Zealand social work: Contexts and practice* (pp. 265–278). Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press.
- Nash, M. (2001b). Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand: Its origins and traditions. In M. Connolly (Ed.), *New Zealand social work: Contexts and practice* (pp. 32–43). Melbourne, VIC: Oxford University Press.
- Shapiro, I. (2011). *The real world of democratic theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. *Children & Society*, 15(2), 107–117. doi:10.1002/chi.617
- Social Workers Registration Board. (2015). Kaitiakitanga – Draft concept. Retrieved from <http://www.swrb.govt.nz/>
- Social Workers Registration Board. (2016). The process for recognition/re-recognition of social work qualifications in New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.swrb.govt.nz/policy>
- The College of Social Work. (2012). Reforming social work qualifying education. Retrieved from <http://www.tcsw.org.uk/resources/reform-resources/#degree>
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Retrieved from <http://unitec.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1426837>
- Webster, M., McNabb, D., & Darroch, J. (2015). Advancing social work professionalism: Standards for management and leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work Review*, 27(3), 44–56.
- Zubrzycki, J., Green, S., Jones, V., Stratton, K., Young, S., & Bessarab, D. (2014). *Getting it right: Creating partnerships for change. Integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in social work education and practice. Teaching and learning framework*. Sydney, NSW: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Political Leadership in Social Work Education: A Reflection

Darla Spence Coffey

President and Chief Executive Office, Council on Social Work Education (US)

Address for Correspondence:

dcoffey@cswe.org

There is no doubt that there are major schisms occurring around the globe that are deeply troubling to social worker educators – schisms that speak to values that are counter to those that undergird the profession and our educational programs: nationalism, racism, and anti-intellectualism, for example. These forces have led to disruptive and disturbing actions. Brexit in the United Kingdom and the election of Trump in the United States come to mind immediately, but other examples abound. If progress really is characterized by “two steps forward and one step back,” we seem to be in reverse mode. For those of us in the business of preparing the next generation of social workers, these events and the values they represent are particularly challenging.

As social work educators we are both social workers and educators and, in both cases, these times demand that we be leaders. There are a number of ways to respond to such challenges – depending on which of these two “hats” we are wearing, but we need to wear them both.

1. Social work educators as social workers.

The line between acting as a social worker and acting as an educator is necessarily a blurry one. As social workers, we model for students what it means to practise social work and therefore it is important that we get it right. They are watching. Events that threaten our foundational values and principles are deeply disturbing, and yet giving in to purely emotional reactions is a luxury that we – and our world – cannot afford. We must rely on our body of theory and research to guide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in order to develop strategic and deliberate actions.

First, we need to remember that social work across the globe is a profession born out of the need to respond to social and economic disruptions. We have a rich history illustrating the key roles that social workers have played to create large-scale social change that can provide guidance for actions in this contemporary environment. The settlement house movement, the civil rights and women's movements, and deinstitutionalization of dependent children and persons with mental illness, to name a few, are good examples of these (American Academy of Social Work and Social Services, 2015).

Secondly, we must break down the siloes between social work education, research and the many different fields and methods of practice to maximize our impact. There are a number of ways in which we can increase our impact, but in this brief article I will note one in particular that is becoming increasingly significant within our discipline. Profession-wide advocacy can be advanced through utilizing an organizing framework known as the *collective impact model* (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Nee & Jolin, 2012). Collective impact efforts facilitate and organize the contributions of different organizations towards a common goal, each according to their respective strengths, expertise and resources. Successful collective impact initiatives share a vision for the desired change, agree on key measurements to assess progress to the goal(s), coordinate activities that support and reinforce each other, and commit to regular and continuous communication. Finally, as with all collaborative efforts, having an organization serve as the “backbone” of the initiative increases the likelihood of success (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Initiating collaborative projects, along with the structures that are important to their success, takes time and the ongoing investment of committed partners. Given the sense of urgency to respond to political change and the challenges identified, it may be that we need to act and create the structures for change simultaneously. Whilst having a structure with all of these ingredients in place would be ideal, we can also create “good enough” structures to help us move forward. We want to make sure that we do not allow “perfection to be the enemy of the good” and prevent ourselves from moving forward until we have the perfect structure established before we act. Collective impact initiatives, while having a clear method, also lend themselves to this kind of iterative process.

In the US, examples of collective impact include raising the profile of social work through a White House Briefing (2013; <http://www.cswe.org/Advocacy-Policy/2013-CSWE-White-House-Briefing-Presentations> led by the Council on Social Work Education); developing and endorsing legislation to advance the profession, known as the Social Work Reinvestment Act (re-introduced in 2013; <http://www.socialworkreinvestment.org>; led by the National Association of Social Workers); and articulating a set of societal “Grand Challenges” that the social work profession can impact over the next decade (2015; <http://aaswsw.org/grand->

challenges-initiative/; led by the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare). While each of these initiatives were led by a different social work organization, with related, although unique missions, none would have any hope of success without the collaboration of other social work organizations across the education, research and practice sectors. In the US, these efforts have placed social work more definitely at the table in national conversations and planning efforts. In addition, the efforts have created momentum, visibility, and strategic partnerships outside the discipline of social work that have benefitted the profession, such as increased support for social work workforce development (HRSA Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Grants) and an increased presence of social work in national agencies and think tanks (for example, a social work researcher was appointed to sit on the strategic planning committee of the US National Institute of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research). There are undoubtedly excellent examples of such collective impact in other parts of the world and we need to create more opportunities to learn from each other.

Finally, we need to form and nurture new partnerships. We need to align with organizations, foundations, corporations and other entities that may aspire to similar goals even if the reasons for valuing those goals differ. Some of this may make us feel very uncomfortable. As a profession, we often lead with our values and require agreement on the values before we agree to collaboration. I am suggesting that this is not only short-sighted, but will almost surely insulate our efforts and inhibit our progress. In the cases of Brexit in the UK and the election of Trump in the US, these events revealed a level of perceived disenfranchisement and fear among populations that have been thought to have enjoyed historical privilege and protection. If our change efforts do not engage those from “the other side” we will have, at best, learned nothing and, at worst, we could fore-doom our efforts.

2. Social work educators as educators.

Much of what has been articulated above is also salient to our role as educators. However, there are additional ways in which we need to leverage that role to both capitalize on the “learning moment” that the circumstances present, and to better prepare our students for effective practice.

The need to have social work students know our history of participation and leadership in social change efforts is extraordinarily critical in these times. Knowing this history is empowering and provides direction for future action. In the US, the CSWE Center for Diversity and Social & Economic Justice is preparing materials to support faculty in helping students make sense of the current political landscape. Central to this is the need to highlight the ways in which previous leaders of social change maintained a vision for a just society to mobilize change efforts (for example, Frederick Douglass, Jane Addams and Martin Luther King, among others).

Secondly, these times underscore the need for social work students to be better prepared to act within the political and policy context(s) of their practice. In parts of the world, especially in the more developed countries, there has been a decided “tilt” towards clinical practice. We need to return to our roots and bridge the micro–macro practice divide in social work practice and education. It is the ability to apply core social work skills

to different systems that is, after all, the hallmark of the profession. It could be argued that waves of neoliberal influence have nevertheless blunted our resolve, requiring a revisiting of core disciplinary beliefs. Successful interventions at the micro *and* macro levels require facilitating agreement on goals, enlisting allies to support the change, and reframing dynamics so that all parties speak the same language. The kind of events that have occurred across the globe have engendered a great deal of passion in many social work students who are moved to demonstrate, create position statements, and other forms of protest. While protest is an important and valuable means of civic engagement, we need to also help them to embrace their passion within a framework of critical thinking and strategic action at the policy level. It is critical that we emphasize that, while action may be fueled by passion, it is implemented through smart strategy and application of skills.

Finally, we need to be open to learning from our students. If ever there was a time to transition from the “sage on the stage” to “guide by the side” approach to teaching and learning, it is in these times of fast and disruptive change. A leader in the literature on good teaching, Parker Palmer (2007), encouraged educators to nurture their “capacity for connectedness” and to make relationships central in the teaching–learning endeavor. As a social work educator, I always instructed my students that if you wanted to have an *effect* on people, you needed to stay close enough to be *affected by* them. The same is true for teaching and learning.

By attending to these central functions in our positions as professionals and educators, we will undoubtedly encounter opportunities to serve our institutions and communities in leadership roles. We must be willing to step up and embrace these roles, to provide the kind of thought leadership that will engage others, bridge divides, and expand possibilities. We need to reach across disciplinary, professional and geographical boundaries to find allies, supporters and mentors for the work. We need to listen deeply to those whose opinions differ so that we can find ways to align our priorities to others. This will require that we learn to speak the language of politics and policy more fluently than we have, and pay attention to when and how the narratives shift. We must harness the impressive energy of students and early career practitioners in this work, who bring great passion, insights, and new tools (the ever-growing social media platforms). And in so doing, we need to help them understand the difference between protest and strategy.

References

- American Academy of Social Work and Social Services. (2015). *Grand accomplishments in social work*. Retrieved from <http://aaswsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WP2-with-cover.pdf>
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 9(1), 36–42.
- Nee, E., & Jolin, M. (2012). Roundtable on collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 10(4), 25–29.
- Palmer, P. J. (2007). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.