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Feeling Lucky: The serendipitous nature of field education

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Abstract:	Field education and the supervision that occurs during this process cements learning and enhances preparedness for a career in social work. Graduate readiness for social work practice is however a contested subject in New Zealand with recent criticism focusing on the adequacy of social work education. This paper reports on findings from focus groups with twenty-seven faculty members and thirty-five students from 8 Schools of Social Work in New Zealand which explored aspects of the taught and learned curriculum. Overall, students and faculty revealed some dissatisfaction with the taught curriculum on supervision that occurs on campus prior to the placement experience. Many students reported irregularity of placement supervision and associated quality supervision with being lucky. We propose a series of recommendations to address these concerns, emphasizing that students should be able to consistently access effective placement supervision rather than consider this a matter of luck.

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Clinical Social Work Round 3 Reviewer comments

Author response to reviewers: All recommended edits below have been addressed in the manuscript.

COMMENTS TO THE AUTHOR:

Reviewer #1: The authors have adequately responded to reviewer comments, strengthening the paper. As earlier noted, this paper will make a unique contribution to the literature.

Minor edits needed:
-Pg. 5, line 5 ";" needed after "capacities"

-Pg. 6, burnout - one word; Sowbel and Miller is US research (not Canadian)

-Pg. 10, Heads of School - capitalized in second instance not the first.

-Pg. 11, Analysis, second sentence beginning on line 51. De-identification of transcripts alone does not increase credibility and trustworthiness as this sentence implies. In adding, "As one method used to increase credibility and trustworthiness, the transcripts were de-identified…" This would make the statement accurate, and lead into your description of other methods used.

-Attention to the use of commas (e.g., pg. 3, line 37; pg. 4, line 7, 57; pg. 7, line 37; pg. 12, line 17; pg. 20, line 1) would enhance readability

Reviewer #2: The revised paper is much clearer and more succinctly presented.

The keywords do not adequately capture the focus of the paper: suggest availability of field education or student supervision; luck; New Zealand. The paper does not really contribute to constructivist learning theory and recommend this term be omitted.

The external supervisor is now briefly mentioned on page 3 line 7. Somewhat more detail would help the reader understand the way in which this role is enacted in New Zealand. How much time does the supervisor devote to each student? Are the supervisors able to interact with the students' clients? Can the supervisor observe the students?

Minor edit page 5 line 5 - learnings should be learners.

Sowbel & Miller did NOT conduct this study in Canada. They are US educators.

This entire section about students' personal qualities should be omitted. Page 6 - line 25 to page 7 line 24. It is not related to the findings nor picked up again later in the paper.

Reviewer #3: Thank you for addressing the previous comments and for the opportunity to read your revised paper. It is an excellent paper!

I just have a few minor edits for you to consider for this latest revision:

-I'm wondering about the different use of practice and practise for what appears to be the same meaning -- for instance, "readiness to practise" as opposed to "student readiness for practice". I'm guessing it is due to the different New Zealand and North American contexts, but it would be helpful if the same spelling was used for the same meaning or if the different spelling was clarified, and 'practice' was just used for the noun and 'practise' for the verb so it is consistent throughout
-please ensure "burn out" or "burnout" is consistent throughout
-p. 6, line 55 - should this be "field placements" rather than "field placement"?
-p. 8, line 22 - add "and" before "significance conditions"
-p. 10, line 13 - add a comma after "for example)" so it reads "for example),"
-p. 12, line 35 - add a comma after "Faculty A)"
-p. 19, line 30 - change from "students in this research" to either "students participating in this research" or "students in this research study"
-p. 19, line 38 - start sentence with "An" so it says "An understanding of supervision styles"
-p. 19, line 48 - remove comma after "multiple stressors"
-p. 19, line 58 - change "&" to "and" for in-text citations that are not within brackets

Title Page with ALL Author Contact Information

Feeling Lucky: The serendipitous nature of field education

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Abstract

Field education and the supervision that occurs during this process cements learning and enhances preparedness for a career in social work. Graduate readiness for social work practice is however a contested subject in New Zealand with recent criticism focusing on the adequacy of social work education. This paper reports on findings from focus groups with twenty-seven faculty members and thirty-five students from 8 Schools of Social Work in New Zealand which explored aspects of the taught and learned curriculum. Overall, students and faculty revealed some dissatisfaction with the taught curriculum on supervision that occurs on campus prior to the placement experience. Many students reported irregularity of placement supervision and associated quality supervision with being lucky. We propose a

series of recommendations to address these concerns, emphasizing that students should be able to consistently access effective placement supervision rather than consider this a matter of luck.

Key words: Supervision; luck; field instructor, New Zealand; availability of field education

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Abstract

Field education and the supervision that occurs during this process cements learning and enhances preparedness for a career in social work. Graduate readiness for social work practice is however a contested subject in New Zealand with recent criticism focusing on the adequacy of social work education. This paper reports on findings from focus groups with twenty-seven faculty members and thirty-five students from 8 Schools of Social Work in New Zealand which explored aspects of the taught and learned curriculum. Overall, students and faculty revealed some dissatisfaction with the taught curriculum on supervision that occurs on campus prior to the placement experience. Many students reported irregularity of placement supervision and associated quality supervision with being lucky. We propose a series of recommendations to address these concerns, emphasizing that students should be able to consistently access effective placement supervision rather than consider this a matter of luck.

Key words: Supervision; luck; field instructor, New Zealand; availability of field education

Every year in New Zealand approximately 800 students are eligible to graduate with either a Bachelors or Masters Applied degree in social work. Despite these numbers, little is known about the quality of program delivery or the satisfaction graduates have with their professional education. Stakeholder views on social work graduate readiness to practise remain anecdotal with minimal research conducted on workforce retention and development in New Zealand. Notwithstanding this lack of empirical evidence, public figures such as the Minister for Social Development (Bennett, 2014), and the Commissioner for Children in New Zealand (Radio NZ, 2015), have been forthright with their criticism of social work practitioner competence to intervene effectively in cases of child protection and family violence. In response to these criticisms a three-year mixed methods research project focused on gathering empirical evidence about social work education was initiated in 2016. The project aims to develop a professional capabilities framework for newly qualified, advanced and expert social workers in New Zealand. This article discusses the findings from focus groups with social work faculty members and students related to the field placement component of social work education with an emphasis on student supervision.

Background

In New Zealand, all social work students undertake a minimum of 120 days of field placement in two different organizational settings, receiving a minimum of one hour of formal supervision per week (SWRB, 2017). Prior to the placement, students receive classroom teaching at the higher educational institute about styles of supervision, their role as a supervisee and the requirements and expectations associated with placement supervision. Registration of social workers is not yet mandatory in New Zealand but the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB), the regulatory government entity responsible for recognition of

social work programs, stipulates that all students must receive supervision during placement from a registered supervisor. This requirement has placed considerable onus on degree providers to find placements in organizations that have field instructors who meet this criteria or alternatively pay for an external field instructor to provide the regular supervision. External field instructors usually provide weekly or fortnightly supervision away from the placement organization and they do not interact with the student's clients during the placement. Observation of the student during the placement is generally undertaken by the person responsible for the student in the organization (not social work registered) not the external field instructor. This situation is especially challenging in an environment where registration is not mandatory and placement agencies do not necessarily employ registered social workers. There is no research to suggest that registered social workers provide better supervision to students than non-registered social workers.

Field instructors in New Zealand are not required to have a graduate qualification in social work supervision, although this is noted as a 'desirable' attribute in the national Field Education Guidelines (ANZASW, 2016). Most schools of social work do provide short informal courses in supervision training for field instructors although attendance is voluntary. The Guidelines for Field Education (ANZASW, 2016) were recently developed by the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) in collaboration with the field education sub-group of the Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand (CSWEANZ). These guidelines outline clear expectations for field instructors, their agencies, and higher educational institutions to strengthen the accountability and professionalism of field education in New Zealand. The limitations of the guidelines are that they are simply 'guidelines', and not enforceable as a benchmark for best practice in field education. Together with the SWRB program recognition standards (SWRB, 2017) these guidelines constitute a set of expectations for social work field instruction in New Zealand.

Literature

Certainly the dynamic nature of day-to-day events that occur in placement organizations, the diversity of people students encounter and the unique and unpredictable nature of the way professional practice unfolds are all conditions that contribute to a rich learning context for students. Within this context students learn from the experiences encountered in the field, making sense of these experiences through the integration of prior knowledge, and the interaction with others such as their field instructor, clients, organizational staff and peers. This type of learning reflects a constructivist paradigm where new ways of thinking develop from being confronted with practical contextual problems, having opportunity to critically reflect and actively interpret these events with others, giving rise to new ways of knowing (Pelech, 2010). This process reflects the constructivist principle that knowledge is generated from exposure to new situations with learning evolving from experience and the re-examination of prior knowledge (Pelech, 2010). Students on placement encounter new experiences almost daily, signalling the importance of having accessible quality supervision to help make sense of these new and often demanding situations. This process is central for students to develop practice efficacy, a social work identity and understanding of complex client and organizational dynamics. While a constructivist paradigm posits that new learning can be derived from new experiences and social encounters, student supervision is the site where professional meaning-making of these context specific encounters can most readily occur.

The centrality of field education as a core component for learning in social work is undisputed, with prominent researchers attesting to the abiding significance of placement learning for the development of a social work professional (Bogo, 2015; Kadushin, 1991). Despite agreement about the integral role of field education in shaping the knowledge and skills for becoming a social worker, agency settings provide contested and variable sites for

learning (Maidment, 2001). To establish a foundation for field education within this contested terrain, four educational principles have been proposed that can be applied across all agency contexts (Bogo, 2010, 2015). These include:

> (1) field education takes place within an available and supportive relationship; (2) learners benefit from a balance between structure and autonomy in practice and learning; (3) learners need to develop reflective and conceptual capacities; and (4) observation, reflective discussion, and provision of constructive feedback facilitates mastery of skills (Bogo, 2010, p. 105).

The field instructor is crucial in the application of the above principles in setting the tone and promoting the conditions within the agency setting to encourage such learning to take place. It is evident that many field instructors are aware of their responsibilities in this regard and in some cases actively seek to protect students from negative staff attitudes and practices that could impact on their learning (Chilvers, 2018).

It is clear from research with social work students in field placements that they commonly experience a range of stressors (Collins, Coffey, & Morris, 2010; Litvack, Bogo, & Mishna, 2010). During placement, students are likely to encounter complex and demanding situations that can be emotionally taxing such as working with children and adults who have been abused, witnessing high levels of anger or emotional distress, or potentially being threatened by a client (Grant, Kinman, & Alexander, 2014). In these situations it is imperative that students have available to them supervision which is both accessible and supportive, where there is opportunity to safely reflect and request assistance and instruction where necessary (Davys & Beddoe, 2009). Student supervision is a space where immediate attention can be offered to develop the level of emotional resilience necessary for the exigencies of practice (Kanno & Koeske, 2010). Grant, Kinman, and Baker (2015) found that

input from field instructors is key to helping students generate self-awareness, develop strategies for building resilience and increase capacity for reflective practice to address the stressors encountered in day-to-day social work. These findings are in keeping with earlier assertions that note that field instructors are not only tasked with reporting on student learning and development but also have a responsibility to prepare students in ways to address potential professional burnout and compassion fatigue (Bride & Figley, 2007).

Research with placement students indicates that the nature of the relationship between the student and their field instructor is a crucial risk or protective factor for student wellbeing and learning (Litvack et al., 2010). Significantly, social work students who work with difficult clients and do not receive adequate supervision or instruction risk experiencing work-related emotional burnout, while those that do have access to quality supervision (including positive feedback processes) feel more empowered by practice challenges, engendering a sense of satisfaction, confidence and efficacy within their fieldwork (Kanno & Koeske, 2010).

The organizational environment in which the placement occurs can either enhance or hinder student learning (Agglias, 2010; Litvack et al., 2010). These authors found that in organizations where difficult power dynamics or stressful events occurred these could be mitigated and used as teaching moments in cases where the student had a good relationship with their field instructor. Where such a relationship did not exist, the negative organizational context combined with a poor supervisory relationship resulted in a "toxic situation" that impacted negatively on student learning (Litvack et al., 2010, p. 234). Establishing trust between the student and their field instructor is crucial for an effective and safe supervisory relationship to exist (Egan, Maidment, & Connolly, 2017).

Research into field education indicates that social work students undertake placements in a diverse range of organizational settings (Author, 2014). Accessing enough field placements to allocate to students is a well-worn subject in the social work literature within a climate of placement shortage and agency saturation (Ayala et al., 2018; Author, 2014). Striking the balance between finding enough placements while also being mindful of the 'quality' in terms of organizational setting and availability of student supervision is at the heart of the allocation agenda (Gordon, McGeoch, & Stewart, 2009). Importantly, negotiations for field placements occur within a context where there is often urgency from both the academic institution and students to get the field education component of the social work degree completed in a timely fashion.

Previous research conducted with students on field placements in New Zealand has identified the notion of 'luck', as being part of the student discourse when discussing their field placements (Maidment, 2001; Moorhouse, Hay, & O'Donoghue, 2014). Philosophers theorising luck refer to this concept using three types of conditions: chance conditions; lack of control conditions; and significance conditions (Broncano-Berrocal, 2015). This author argues that the notion of luck signifies a lack of control over the relevant event, in this case the field placement allocation and supervision received. Adopting this discourse appears to suggest that students believe their placement allocation and subsequent supervision experience is not so much a planned process but one left to chance where they may be 'lucky' or not with the field instructor and organization to which they are allocated. This discourse hints at a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency students feel related to placement allocation.

Research to gather the views of students and program faculty in New Zealand about their perceptions of placement supervision is minimal (Maidment, 2001; Moorhouse et al., 2014) with most studies focusing more on managers' and field instructors' perspectives

(Author, 2015, 2016; Chilvers, 2018). Better understanding of program faculty and student views on the supervision curriculum and experiences of supervision during placement may contribute to future curriculum developments and thus enhance graduate readiness to practise, the broader focus of our research. This article reports on one aspect of the focus groups undertaken with program faculty members and final year students, that is, the curriculum and experiences of placement supervision.

Method

Larger Study Design

The three-year study on enhancing the readiness to practise of newly qualified social workers employed a mixed-methods approach. The first phase had a primary emphasis on the planned, delivered and experienced social work curriculum (Harden, 2001). A process of curriculum mapping was firstly applied to the course descriptors from the fourteen (14) social work schools that agreed to participate in the project. Curriculum mapping is an established methodological approach that enables a visual representation of the declared curriculum (Ervin, Carter, & Robinson, 2013). While mapping alternative curricula allows comparisons and patterns to become visible, schools were likely to use different terms to express educational topics and concepts. Therefore, a taxonomy of standard vocabulary across the different curricula was created (Ballantyne et al., 2016). The taxonomy and database provide a snapshot in time of the *planned* curriculum for social work in New Zealand. Focus groups with program faculty and students were then used as the method to collect data for the purpose of exploring the *taught* and *learned* curriculum.

Ethics

Ethics approval was granted by the [*Name of institutional Ethics Committee*]. Ethical considerations focused on confidentiality of the participating schools as well as the focus group participants. The potential for conflicts of interest was addressed by the focus group interviews not being conducted by researchers from that participating institution. The interviews were then transcribed by the research assistant and de-identified by the researcher before being shared with the research team. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, their rights, and the storage and use of data in the information sheet and verbally prior to the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Research Design and Participants

There are 17 institutions offering programs recognized by the SWRB in New Zealand. Since some institutions offer more than one recognized program (a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and a Master of Applied Social Work (MASW) for example), there are a total of 22 social work programs. At the beginning of the project a letter inviting each school of social work to participate in the research was sent to the 17 Heads of School. Fourteen (82%) of the schools agreed to participate in the study, and between them they offered 19 (86%) of all recognized programs. Of the 19 programs included in the study, 14 were Bachelor's Degree programs, two were Bachelor Honours Degree programs, and three were Master's Degree programs.

Following the curriculum mapping exercise described above, the researchers approached the Heads of School from the participating institutions for permission to email senior students and program faculty with information about participating in focus groups. Eight institutions responded favourably to this request and a liaison was established between the school administrator and the research assistant to determine a convenient time for the

focus groups. The eight schools were geographically spread throughout New Zealand, and included both polytechnics and universities. The information sheet, interview schedule, consent form and focus group details were also distributed by the administrator to potential participants. At this point potential participants could then make direct contact with the research assistant, thus ensuring confidentiality from the program head and other staff or students.

The interviews and focus groups were conducted at the participating institution by a researcher not employed by the school. Due to timing and availability, some students and one faculty member were interviewed by telephone or Skype. This meant that seven focus groups and five individual interviews were held with students, and eight focus groups and two individual interviews with faculty members. The interviews were audio-recorded and were 60-90 minutes in duration. Consent forms were signed prior to the interview. A semi-structured interview format was followed; consideration of the literature informed the interview schedule; and feedback from a recent graduate and a social work academic further ensured the suitability of the questions. All of the authors facilitated interviews, which was helpful for practical reasons, however this also meant that the questions and interview structure were not entirely consistent.

In total, twenty-seven faculty members and thirty-five students engaged in the focus groups during the period between November 2016-February 2017. The faculty members ranged from being new to academia to having over three decades in higher education. The program faculty taught across a range of subjects, mostly in the BSW. Nine taught in qualifying master's programs. The majority of the students were in fulltime study and all but two were enrolled in a BSW. Most of the students were completing the third or fourth year of the Bachelor's program or the final year of the qualifying master's degree.

Analysis

The data was analysed using a thematic approach, initially driven by the interview questions (Bryman, 2012). As one method used to increase credibility and trustworthiness, the transcripts were de-identified by the interviewer prior to them being coded by one researcher using NVivo 11. A codebook highlighted the overarching nodes and the node reports were then analysed by two different researchers who identified themes for the thematic tables. These researchers discussed similarities and differences in the identified themes and rechecked the nodes if necessary to determine the final themes. The program faculty and student data were analysed separately and then integrated following the completion of the thematic tables. Using three researchers in the coding process helped ensure credibility of the findings. As the research involved an in-depth study of a relatively small number of participants from a specific context, it cannot be claimed that the results can be transferred to other contexts. However, the researchers have endeavoured to produce a thick description of the perceptions of the participants, thus enabling readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the transferability of the results to other contexts and times (Bryman, 2012; Shenton, 2004).

All demographic data is reported in this article in a manner that assures anonymity. Quotations from individual participants are not attributed to them or their institution and an alphanumeric code or the neutral pronoun 'they' is used to further guarantee anonymity. The descriptors below (for example, Student FG [Focus Group] A) indicates a particular focus group rather than an individual student. Faculty and student codes are not aligned (for example, Student A is not necessarily from the same participating institution as Faculty A), thus further protecting anonymity.

Findings

The data from the student and program faculty focus groups illustrated the centrality of the field placement and supervision for cementing previous learning and enhancing the preparedness of students for their social work career. Several themes were generated from the data and are discussed below. The program faculty and students questioned the adequacy of the current supervision curriculum and the associated classroom teaching. The participants also highlighted the effects of current underfunding in social work field education. The accessibility of supervision during placements was another notable theme. A strong discourse of luck was evident throughout the student responses, suggesting that they feel limited control over placement allocation and placement supervision.

The supervision curriculum

Supervision is a subject taught in all of the social work programs in New Zealand although some students questioned whether the classroom teaching was useful:

> *They did spend a lot of time trying to explain supervision but… but what the hell is it? You don't know it until you're actually getting it and then you don't know if you're getting it right (Student FG I).*

These students recommended having the opportunity to experience supervision on campus, prior to placement as "having any experience in supervision before you actually go in to, on placement, would actually give you an idea of what supervision is supposed to be, so you would know whether you're missing it or not" (Student FG I). Interestingly, the program faculty also wondered about the adequacy of the teaching content related to supervision:

> *We introduce supervision as a concept, they get supervision while they're on practice, we talk about how important it is … but do we do enough that says what is your role in supervision, what is their role in supervision, what are the different types of supervision? (Faculty FG A).*

Field instructors are not required to complete any specific training prior to student placements and this was highlighted by students as potentially affecting the quality of supervision:

> *I wonder how prepared the supervisors are for us and I wonder about their supervision qualifications because, trust me, it seems like nothing. Supervision was taking the cases that you were working on into the room and talking about those, that was what my supervisor thought supervision was. It wasn't deep reflection on what was going on and I wonder whether the supervisors need to have a day's worth of training on [supervision] (Student FG A).*

Underfunding of social work programs was repeatedly identified by program faculty as a significant barrier for the preparation and teaching of both social work students and field instructors and as the students identify below, lack of funding also affects agency willingness to take placement students:

> *We are underfunded, we don't have enough staff to teach in the way that we need to teach and that is particularly around fieldwork education. We can't support our field [instructors] to learn as much as we want them to. We can't support them financially (Faculty FG D).*

> *…agencies who do placements get zero money, it's a mess compared to other countries that do get a kind of payment, they vie to get students on placement (Student FG A).*

Accessing quality supervision

Weekly supervision (or equivalent) is a mandated requirement for all placement students in New Zealand (SWRB, 2017). Unfortunately, being unable to access regular supervision on placement was a common thread in the student focus groups:

> *On my third year that was an absolute disaster and it [supervision] didn't happen for six, seven weeks … (Student FG J).*

> *I had only eight out of my twenty- three weeks I had supervision…when you're meant to have it weekly (Student FG A).*

Regular, quality supervision appeared to some students as more difficult to access in statutory sector placements; attributed to high workloads "because they are incredibly busy, they are really busy" (Student FG C). Irregular placement supervision was also aligned with unsafe practice:

> *…in our cohort there was at least four people who…oh there was more than that who didn't have any supervision…one didn't have supervision their whole placement and ended up having quite a meltdown …it was just really unsafe practice (Student FG A).*

The emphasis on case management rather than a reflexive supervision style, also associated with the statutory organizations, raised further questions from students as to the adequacy of some supervision practice:

> *My first supervision session [with a RSW in a statutory agency] started off by saying, she asked me what I expected from it and I said, supervision and I want to tie it to theory and she said, oh I'm not actually a reflective person, I just do the job (Student FG J).*

The high levels of employment for students following their placements was often proudly referred to in the faculty focus groups and was seen as indicative of student readiness

to practise. From the student perspective however, decisions around future employment were primarily influenced by the regularity and quality of supervision on their placement; signalling student agency in the employment process:

> *The supervisor is really supportive. Yeah, they offer me like a weekly internal supervision, fortnightly supervision, fortnightly peer supervision. .. so yeah I prefer I would work for NGO [non-government organization] as my first job (Student FG C).*

> *I think right now if you ask me to do that kind of job I can't do that … it's not good for a new social worker because they don't provide formal or regular supervision (Student FG C).*

Current resource constraints in New Zealand mean that not all students have external supervision available to them, although both faculty staff and students valued the provision of this type of supervision as a way of ensuring all students had access to quality, regular supervision.

> *I feel somehow like the [educational institution] needs to have an external [field instructor] who's accredited … and make sure that it occurs because when you're out in an agency it's not occurring just because of the nature of the work and how busy it is (Student FG J).*

> *I mean those students who have external supervision with us they benefit and they are really advantaged. They are in social work placements without a social worker and so we provide supervision for them and they have that continuous catch up with each other with a good social work supervisor (Faculty FG C).*

This emphasis on external supervision raises questions concerning the efficacy of current individual supervision models and organizational commitment to allowing field instructors sufficient time to supervise student placements.

Luck

Repeated references to the concept of luck and similar sentiments were evident within the student focus group discussions. Referring to oneself as lucky suggests that students view field instructor selection as one based on chance rather than a planned process. In the quote below this student claims she is 'fortunate' and 'lucky' to have a good field instructor who helped build critical thinking capacity:

> *I was so fortunate in my first placement to have a supervisor who encouraged and nurtured critical thinking. I was so lucky, I didn't realise how lucky I was and then to be thrown into [statutory placement agency] this year where critical thinking is like this incredibly rare thing (Student FG A).*

Reference to being 'thrown' into the statutory placement does not speak to a careful allocation process, which program faculty signalled was their approach to organising placements. Hence, there is a disjuncture between how higher educational institutions discuss planned placement allocation with the sense of randomness in the way students express their experience of allocations. Students 'feel lucky' if they get a good placement agency and access to quality supervision. Similarly, a student from a different institution noted she was 'lucky' to have such rich learning transactions:

> *I've been really lucky on my two placements, I've had really good supervision, so much so that they keep on asking me all these questions about theory and reflective .. and I'm like, oh my god, I have to think .. so it's quite a different experience [from peers] but I know that I've been quite lucky and it [supervision] was pretty much weekly (Student FG J).*

In keeping with a constructivist paradigm one of the student focus groups discussed the peer learning and support derived from discussions between students but attributed this process to luck rather than an educational strategy used for learning.

> *I'd say that we are a really lucky class, our particular year are really good conversationalists and communicators and supportive of each other so we're really lucky to have opened [up] these conversations with each other as well, which piqued interests and keeps us informed. (Student FG I)*

Certainly students who had opportunities while on placement to connect with peers and discuss what was happening for them derived significant support from this process. The organizational culture and openness to having a student on placement is critical for effective learning but was also seen to be somewhat rare and outside of the norm:

> *I've been very fortunate with my agency, you know, they've really got me out there doing the job … and I think I've just been quite fortunate that I've walked into this agency very open to have a student that really [provides] hands-on experience and challenges me not to a point where I'm broken down and can't do it, but again if I do struggle I ask for help (Student FG H).*

Discussion

Several interesting features have come to the fore in the analysis of data from this research. One of the key messages we received was that students attributed receiving good supervision, experiencing peer learning and engaging with functional social service organizations as a matter of good luck, rather than being exposed to planned learning opportunities. Without doubt, supervision has a critical role in the professional development of students while they are on placement (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). In keeping with the

principles for quality field instruction discussed earlier (Bogo, 2010), accessible supervision that helps grow reflective capacity and conceptual thinking with opportunities to engage with constructivist learning through discussions with the field instructor and peers is optimal. The findings from this study demonstrate that while placement supervision was identified as important by both program faculty members and students, there were significant gaps between what is espoused by higher educational institutions and what is experienced by students on placements.

Insufficient supervision is not a new issue with previous research indicating that it may lead to students being more vulnerable in the placement environment or risking burnout (Kanno & Koeske, 2010). While students in challenging placements may be able to cope if they are receiving timely, helpful supervision, if it is largely absent then this can be debilitating (Litvack et al., 2010). In pressured environments, as highlighted by several student comments, supervision can often become focused on tasks and managing risk, which limits opportunities to reflect and consider the integration of theory and practice (Chinnery & Beddoe, 2011). Poor supervision on placement is likely to reflect the standard of supervision practice in that organization, which not only affects students' development but also retention and safe practice once in employment (Zeira & Schiff, 2014). The students participating in this research recognized this relationship between supervision, staff retention and safe practice.

The social work curriculum in New Zealand includes the teaching of knowledge and skills on supervision (Ballantyne et al., 2016). There is a tension, however, between what is taught in the degree programs and what students experience on placement. An understanding of supervision styles and how to build an effective supervisor-supervisee relationship based on trust gives students courage to advocate for better supervision, if necessary, while on placement (Egan et al., 2017). A strong supervisory relationship can also mitigate the

multiple stressors experienced by students on placement, thus strengthening their professional practice and identity (Grant et al., 2014).

The nature of the environment and culture of the organization hosting the student has considerable bearing on the success or otherwise of the placement trajectory (Litvack et al., 2010). As Dunn, Schier, Hiller, and Harding (2016) propose, a successful match between a student's skills, knowledge and values,nd the field instructor and their organizational setting is vital for ensuring the effectiveness of the placement. Sourcing suitable placements is often challenging for program faculty and the matching process may be somewhat haphazard. This can result in limited attention being paid to whether individual students are suited for the specific agency and type of work on offer (Author, 2014). Despite this, students engaged in challenging work environments can build practice capacity and manage the demands when an encouraging supervisor who supports reflective practice is accessible (Agllias, 2010; Kanno & Koeske, 2010).

In contrast to some of the findings in this study, previous research has highlighted that students generally prefer their primary supervisory relationship to be in the placement organization (Cleak & Smith, 2012). External field instructors are not available to students on a daily basis and generally have limited insight into the placement organization (Zuchowski, 2013). That said, external supervisors can provide a safe, objective space for new learning to students (Zuchowski, 2013). Whether supervision is provided internally or externally, field instructors and students need to be given the time and resourcing to develop safe relationships as well as engage in regular sessions (Beddoe, 2012).

Congruent with other research findings from the New Zealand context (Maidment, 2001; Moorhouse et al., 2014), students felt lucky to be on a placement in an organization where they could experience relevant learning both within the organizational context and in

supervision, compared to their peers who were not so lucky. The variability of quality in relation to organizational learning settings and the provision of supervision, raised by many students in this study, is a significant concern.

Limitations

There are some limitations to our study. As with most qualitative studies, the findings provide only a snapshot in place and time, in this instance, an aspect of social work education in New Zealand in the 2016-7 period. Further, we depended on people's subjective perspectives on supervision and field education and the decision by other faculty staff and students not to participate in the study may result in bias. The dynamics of focus groups also means that we cannot be sure we captured the full extent of each interviewee's knowledge or experiences. The inclusion of larger numbers of participants and more schools of social work would have provided greater diversity.

Implications

Our findings signal a number of issues relevant for program faculty and field instructors wishing to increase the quality experiences of supervision, and field education more generally, for placement students.

First, given the variability in the student experiences of placement allocation, program faculty should consider how to strengthen their relationships with both students and field instructors to support the allocation process (Gordon et al., 2009). This might require additional workload provision and resourcing for faculty members to enable the time to build these networks with potential field instructors and other placement agency staff. A national conversation with faculty, employers, field instructors, the SWRB and ANZASW to clarify student supervision expectations and standards could lead to better quality supervision for students. This would build on the previous development of the national Field Education

Guidelines (ANZASW, 2016) and is a planned strategy as part of the final phase of this current research.

Second, students could increase their knowledge and supervision experience prior to their placements through improvements in campus teaching and the scaffolding of learning throughout the degree curriculum. Opportunities for students to access supervision through the higher educational institution while they are studying other courses would allow for valuable experiential learning prior to placement.

Third, field instructor knowledge of supervisory roles and responsibilities, as outlined in the national Field Education Guidelines, needs embedding in both student and field instructor curriculum and training so that supervision is fully realised as a protective factor for students (ANZASW, 2016; Litvack et al., 2010). Establishing accessible and consistent nation-wide training of models of supervision that are relevant to different practice contexts (Davys & Beddoe, 2009), would benefit all social work students and increase the quality of supervision provision.

Fourth, it is imperative that the SWRB requirement of regular (weekly or equivalent) access to supervision is upheld on student placements (SWRB, 2017). A three-pronged approach to addressing this concern is recommended. Firstly, interviewing field instructors and agencies to find out why they are not offering the components in quality supervision and why in so many instances students are not receiving the most basic allotment of time for supervision is pertinent. Secondly, lobbying for increased funding for the higher educational providers could enable them to have greater flexibility in how they support organizations as well as individual field instructors. Discussions regarding the funding band for social work education are currently in progress with the Tertiary Education Commission in New Zealand. Thirdly, additional resources could then incentivise involvement in field education, as

managers could relieve some of the workload pressures on field instructors so they have more time available to support and supervise students. If internal supervision is being provided regularly and in an effective manner then the desire for external supervision, unless necessary due to constraints around the availability of a registered social worker, may also decrease.

Finally, by implementing these recommendations the educational principles that underpin effective field education can be more fully realised in New Zealand (Bogo, 2010). The strong notion of luck that has been evident from students in this study may then be replaced by the expectation and reality that all students can, and should, receive quality supervision during a learning-focused placement.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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