



University of South Australia

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

GUIDELINES FOR FIELD EDUCATORS in SOCIAL WORK and SOCIAL SCIENCES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Guidelines for Field Educators* produced by the University of South Australia's School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Course Outline for students which explains the field education requirements for students undertaking their placement. These documents will be made available to you electronically.

The guidelines in this document have a number of purposes, including:

- The clear delineation of the School of Social Work and Social Policy's pedagogical philosophy in relation to field education;
- An affirmation of the School's commitment to social work education as a responsibility which is shared by students, university staff and staff in human service organisations offering placements – 'Partnerships for Learning';
- A recognition that social work theory and practice are closely intertwined and inform each other to a degree which is unique in academic disciplines (Parton, 2000);
- Provision of information on some current teaching domains and practices in the School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy and their rationale (e.g. reflective practice, the use of portfolios in field education);

Acknowledging the contribution of Eddie Le Sueur

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SECTION 1

THE SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY'S EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

The School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy (The School) has established a conceptual framework for Field Education (FE) courses, built around a number of teaching and learning principles, in order to promote excellence in fieldwork training and practice and, at the same time, to recognise the professions' desired outcomes for graduates. These principles are consistent with directions articulated in a number of recent policy statements. They give effect to the university's 'Teaching and Learning Framework' (June 2007) and the Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) 'Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS). The selected principles for Field Education framework are as follows:

- Participation and collaboration
- Student-centred learning
- Reflective practice
- Active learning
- Practice standards.

The principles endorse values of human rights, equity, social justice and gender equality. They are also in accordance with the university's expression of graduate qualities which states that a graduate is presumed to have the following attributes:

1. Operates effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice.
2. Is prepared for life-long learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice.
3. Is an effective problem solver, capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems.
4. Can work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional.
5. Is committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and citizen.
6. Communicates effectively in professional practice and as a member of the community.
7. Demonstrates international perspectives as a professional and as a citizen.

Participation and Collaboration

The Social Work and Social Science programs in the School are based on the premise that practice and practitioner training are a critical focus of human service academic programs. In turn, practice has to be founded on a sound and expanding knowledge base, humanist values, ethical conduct and informed judgment.

Logically, the teaching of practice needs to be a shared responsibility between universities and organisations which plan and deliver services, with substantial reference to service users. Discussing social work education, the UK agency, 'Advocacy in Action' states (2006, p.345):

The future of social work education depends on a bringing together of the personal and professional, of students and providers with service users and service-eligible people, within those 'honest, trusting and human' partnerships which truly enable and promote shared learning. Nothing less will do.

In relation to organisations and academic bodies at least, such a goal requires collaborative partnerships with complementary roles and functions which are monitored and evaluated and preferably formalised in written agreements at some point.

Field Education teaching depends on the combined efforts of the student, academic and FE staff, organisations and professionals. Field Educators support the learning that occurs in the practice environment and provide 'supervision'. The process relies on partnerships to achieve positive learning experiences and positive outcomes in terms of the specified learning objectives in each Field Education course.

Research and evaluations (Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 1997; Cooper & Briggs, 2000; Noble, 2001; Maidment, 2006) have identified Field Education as a critical element of the learning experience for students. Feedback from students confirms that the opportunity to 'practise' with support consolidates and extends the knowledge and skills developed in the classroom. Parton (2000,p.461) claims that practice and theory are closely inter-related in social work , with practice informing the development of theory at least as much as being informed by it. Further, this is both its great strength and distinctiveness. Significantly, students also talk about the placement experience assisting them to build a sense of professional identity. Parker (2005, p.12), in a study of bachelors' and masters' students in a UK university, argues that practice learning promotes self-efficacy in students and justifies the increased emphasis being placed upon it. Human services professional associations have supported the place of field education as an integral element of curriculum and accreditation guidelines usually specify significant 'hours' for this teaching.

The emphasis in the School is increasingly directed towards a greater integration of research, academic training and field practice. The concept of partnership serves as a useful medium to bring together these elements of the education process. As Allan (2001, pp.149-50) states, partnerships should be viewed as far more than a defence against fieldwork placement shortages. In addition to the advantages suggested by Allan (2001), those who are likely to benefit most are students who will perceive a diminution of the postulated gap between learning and the reality of practice, and ultimately their clients.

The direction embraced by the School is contained in the notion of 'Partnerships for Learning'. This acknowledges the contribution made by the various players in achieving successful outcomes. Each student needs to be willing to engage in the learning process, to take on responsibilities and tasks that will test skill levels and develop those skills with the support of Field Educators, clients, other practitioners and staff who interact with the student and the particular client situation. Academic staff members contribute to Field Education learning through teaching content and processes that build knowledge and skills relevant to the practice world. Curriculum development processes are

designed to prepare graduates for the current and evolving demands of professional work. Organisations and designated practitioners provide experiential learning opportunities and extend the teaching to the practice world. It is in this context that knowledge and practice skills are applied in the work with clients, however they may be defined (client as an individual, family, group, community or organisation).

The figure below is intended to illustrate the combination of players who contribute to the learning process and represent a series of inter-connected partnerships.

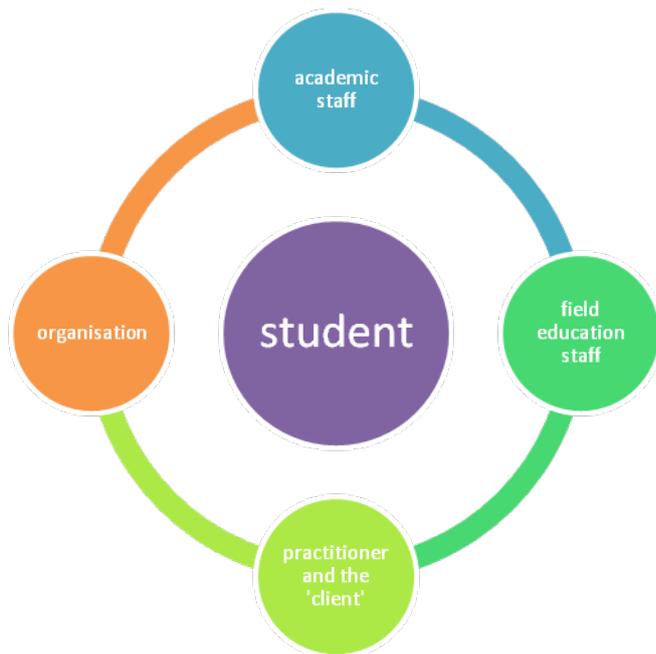


Fig.1: Field Education: Partnerships for Learning

Student-centred Learning

While human service programs in the university recognise the centrality of the client and the precedence of their interests over those of students and organisations, they are also concerned with assisting the student to work within the organisational context and wider community expectations. The realisation of these goals is sought through academic and field courses that assist students to achieve a balance between client interests and the practice context. In this sense, Field Education courses are student-centred. They are structured to ensure that each student works through steps to focus on their own learning experience, achievements and needs. They assist the student to identify stages in their development as practitioners and to obtain practice opportunities which are relevant to these stages.

The work of supervision involves teaching about practice and overseeing the quality and development of work undertaken by the student. Within the practice context, the field educator/supervisor becomes a critical contributor to support learning. Cleak & Wilson (2007, p.50) contend that supervision needs to be seen as a partnership and advocate a critical reflective approach, focused on student strengths, which:

- Recognises the student as the 'expert' in his or her own learning;
- Views supervision as a mutual learning experience;
- Seeks to depersonalise any problems faced by the student and to focus on the capacities of the student;
- Is oriented towards exploration of future possibilities rather than past issues.

In this emphasis on practice learning that is student-centred and based on individual needs, there is a nexus with reflective practice. In commenting on different strategies used to assist reflection, Boud and Knights (1994, p.229) state that:

... they share the feature that students are encouraged to return to their own experiences in class and outside and focus on what these events mean to them.

It is an important part of the development of the self in the role of practitioner.

Reflective Practice

The notion of reflective practice has been incorporated into teaching in the professional awards in the School. The core of reflection includes a positive embracing of the doubts, anxieties, uncertainties and contradictions which are an integral part of the human condition and attendant upon all forms of intervention. Reflection is the effort to confront conflicting forces and multiple realities and to use them in constructive change for the self and others (Gursansky, Quinn & Le Sueur, 2008, work in progress).

Donald Schön's (1983) model of reflection in action and reflection on action is actively employed in field teaching in the School. Schön contends that the idea of a 'kind of knowing' in intelligent action is significantly manifested in many areas of life and is well-documented (1991, pp.50-2). He (1991, p.49) contrasts this with what he sees as the limitations of technical rationality and argues:

... for an epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict.

Plath (2006, p.67) postulates that these critical reflective practices:

... emphasise the importance of continually analysing the impact of values, relationships, context, past experiences and feelings in seeking to understand individuals and society.

Noble (2001, p.349) relates how reflective processes largely derived from Schön's paradigm that emphasises interaction, reflection and dialogue with service users are being widely employed in field teaching as a way of consolidating and making explicit the link between theory and practice.

Acknowledging this, the School recognises the need to teach students reflective practice, provide opportunities for them to practise it and to introduce them to a range of aids to facilitate its growth. These aids include journals, de-briefing, critical incident analysis, autobiographical work and other narratives. The use of on-line journals is being trialled, while an acceptance of the importance of peer interaction (individual and group) in the establishment of a professional identity is retained.

Active Learning

Students are both prepared for and expected to become active and self-regulating learners. This is realised in Field Education through the design of assessment tasks and processes which are detailed in course information booklets.

The approach taken is consistent with the university's new teaching and learning framework (2007) which identifies three components of experiential learning – practice-based learning, the teaching-research nexus, service-learning – and has the intention of making:

... what students do, rather than what staff do, the central focus of ... teaching and learning. The approach is based on research that indicates that students who are undertaking active learning tasks perform better, enjoy their studies more and rate their overall satisfaction more highly.

Practice Standards

It is recognised that there is some philosophical divergence between the use of practice standards, measured by outcomes, and reflective practice, with its acceptance of uncertainties and ambiguities and its concern with self-assessment, intuition, creativity and process. Nevertheless, there is a reasonable expectation on the part of organisations, service users, governments and other funding bodies that human service workers meet an acceptable or specified standard and 'produce results'.

The School has adopted AASW practice standards in each social work course and Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) practice standards for the Social Sciences course as a basis for specifying areas of competence that each student needs to be able to demonstrate. In moving to practice standards, each program recognises the potential tension between competency and reflection. However, they are also seen as being in line with the direction being pursued by professional associations and with the endorsement of standards for accountability purposes in human service organisations. The juxtaposition, while admittedly occasionally uneasy, is dynamic and intended to encourage more critical intervention.

The position adopted is in fact in line with some recent attempts to reconcile the perceived contrary demands of evidence-based (positivist) and reflective (interpretive) practice. For instance, Plath (2000, p.67) argues that evidence to inform practice decisions in social work uses both research findings and other forms of evidence from personal, interpersonal, professional and political sources. A choice between the two is not necessary and research findings should not be used as 'rules for practice, but, rather, as part of a body of evidence to inform reflective decision-making' (p.68).

We hold that this approach can and should be extrapolated to govern the use of practice standards. Knowledge of and informed, appropriate use of these standards is one strand, albeit a significant one, in assessing levels of practice wisdom.

Other Considerations

In addition to the foregoing principles which constitute the core of a conceptual framework for Field Education, the School has a commitment to the regular review and development of its field courses, to their adequate resourcing and to improving the provision of orientation and training for Field

Educators. In the immediate future, attention will be focused on the development of evaluation measures for practice standards.

Language to Support Field Education

Field Education Director

Oversees the social work and human services field education programs including the preparation for field education, development of academic content and liaison with the field.

Field Education Course Coordinator

Oversees the program and contributes to the assessment and tutorial work.

Field Education Coordinator FECs identify placement opportunities, develop projects around new placement areas and sustain existing areas; assess students and conduct external supervision. FECs facilitate the Action Learning Sets (ALS) and/or tutorials which students attend every fortnight. The use of ALS enables students to engage in the complexities of practice and professional self-formation.

Field Educator

The person in the agency who supervises the student on placement

External Field Educator

An AASW social work qualified person who conducts University based group supervision when the Field Educator does not have a social work qualification.

SECTION 2

FIELD TEACHING ROLES

Field Education Coordinator (FEC)

Each student is involved in pre-placement planning which begins the process of matching students with field placement possibilities. This process is coordinated by the Field Education Team. The Field Education Coordinator is the link between the university and the field and plays an important role in overseeing the student's development whilst on placement.

Field Education Coordinators are responsible for:

- Liaison with agencies/organisations to plan the placement and maintaining a liaison and support role with agencies and supervisors throughout the placement. Where a partnership is being developed or is established between the university and organisations, responsibilities include negotiating arrangements which bring together the educational needs of students, the needs of the sector to engage in practice, evaluation and research which is at the forefront of human services and the interests of the university in contributing to research and knowledge generation.
- Ensuring that such liaison is specified and is clearly contracted between the School and organisation and involves components that are designed to ensure maximum learning support to students and to agencies.
- Ensuring placements are meeting the student's needs.
- Reviewing and guiding student's placement initiatives and activities.
- Providing the first point of contact for students and Field Educators to address issues of concern.

Field Education Course Coordinator

Field Education programs like all academic courses have a Course Coordinator. The Course Coordinator has overall responsibility for the academic development and coordination of the course and is the point of contact for all enquiries relating to her/his respective course. Other responsibilities include: liaising with agency staff to explore and develop placement opportunities and partnerships; leadership and support for FECs; preparation of course materials; provision of training for Field Educators and determining the final grade for each student.

Field Educators

University Field Education staff oversee the Field Education process and agency Field Educators provide the practical, day to day experiences. They take responsibility for managing the placement and assisting the student in structuring a range of activities and undertakings that provoke questions to be explored in weekly supervisory sessions. They are qualified, practising social workers who provide students with role models or mentors from whom much can be assimilated and learned.

Agency Field Educators play an educative and supportive role, link students with other agency staff and external contacts and introduce them to a range of social work experiences.

The Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) guidelines currently require that Field Educators meet the AASW qualifications for professional social work membership and have at least two years experience, after qualifying, working in a professional capacity. Many skilled and experienced people practising in the human services field do not meet these criteria but are committed to contributing to the development of social work students. In some circumstances such an experienced practitioner in partnership may supervise students in conjunction with a Field Educator who meets the AASW requirements. This person is most often a university social work staff member.

SECTION 3

STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND SUPERVISION –THE ROLE OF THE FIELD EDUCATOR

Some Theoretical Underpinnings for Student Assessment and Supervision

This introductory section draws on a range of academic work about student learning in the field education practicum in order to underscore its importance. It also establishes the University of South Australia's position regarding some aspects of current practice. Further, it reinforces earlier references (pp. 8 & 10) to the complexity of field teaching, involving far more than the limited tasks suggested by the ubiquitous term 'supervision'.

It should be noted at the outset that there are several different terms used in the literature to describe the role now referred to as Field Educator in this School. The terms used in various articles include field instructor, field educator, practice teacher and, of course, supervisor. They are retained here where appropriate to uphold the integrity of the sources, while we use Field Educator consistently in the text.

There is also consensus in the literature about the critical nature of the social work practicum to students' learning and professional development (Ryan, McCormack & Clark, 2006; Hopkins, Deal & Bloom, 2005; Lam, 2004; Bogo, Regehr, Hughes, Power & Globerman, 2002; Fortune, McCarthy & Abransom, 2001; Maidment, 2000; Kadushin, 1992). This is accompanied by a similar endorsement of the central role of the Field Educator. For instance, Durkin and Shergill (2000, p.165) state that:

The distinctive contribution of the practice teacher is to enable a blending process which encompasses the tensions between 'education' and 'training' when seeking to promote competence.

Furness and Gilligan (2004, p. 468) elaborate on the significance as follows:

The role of the practice teacher remains central to the assessment of qualifying social workers. Practice teachers assess students' competence in practice and make judgements based on direct observation, feedback from service users and colleagues, supervision sessions and discussion, records and reports. Effectively, they act as gatekeepers for entry to the profession and safeguard the interests of service users and employers alike.

Acknowledging that the role of practice teacher in the UK both requires accreditation and carries more responsibility for placement assessment than that of Field Educator in South Australia, it is still a valid description of the processes involved in supervision.

The supervisory process, in fact, takes a variety of forms and employs concepts from a range of theoretical models described in the literature (Tsui, 2005; Cooper & Briggs, 2000; Bogo & Vayda, 1998).

Morgan and Sprenkle (2007) outline a number of models under broad headings of clinical, developmental, social role, objectives-based and feminist. The primary focus of their work is clinical supervision in marital and family therapy but the models used and the analysis have a broader applicability. They cite Sprenkle and Blow's (2004) 'common factors' approach used in therapy which

are 'the common mechanisms of change which cut across all effective psychotherapy approaches.' Morgan and Sprenkle suggest that this approach can be applied productively to supervision models, even though it has not received the same degree of empirical testing here as it has in psychotherapy.

They argue that there are a likely set of elements that most good supervision will have in common (p.8). The identified domains include the development of clinical skills; knowledge acquisition about client dynamics, clinical theories, intervention strategies and other issues; professional functioning in compliance with professional practice, ethical standards and administrative duties; personal growth, awareness and emotional management; autonomy and confidence. In addition to the emergence of these qualities in the student, the monitoring and evaluation of his/her progress is seen as an important component of supervision.

All of their identified domains receive universal recognition in the broader literature on supervision, sometimes with qualifications as considered briefly below.

From their postulated domains, Morgan and Sprenkle propose that the emphasis in supervision can oscillate between the development of clinical competence and professional competence (p.10). It can also vary in its specificity from the idiosyncratic clinical and professional needs of the student to the clinical and professional needs of the field at large. Finally, in a third dimension, the nature of the supervisor/supervisee relationship can vary from a collaborative to a more directive relationship.

Morgan and Sprenkle suggest that there are four major overlapping roles for the supervisor which they identify as coach, teacher, mentor and administrator.

There are several highly useful insights into the nature and functions of the supervisory role in this analysis and it confirms in some detail the importance of supervision to professional development. Morgan and Sprenkle's views are generally in accordance with constructivist views of learning. Cooper (2000, p.17) refers to Lev Vygotsky's contributions to constructivism and lists some key educational principles which are echoed in Morgan and Sprenkle's supervisory model. These principles are:

- Learning is social. It is a dynamic interaction between the collective and the individual.
- Students learn through a process of interaction with others.
- Peers, other adults or experts are important for learning.
- Cooperative and peer group activities are important for learning.
- Students will learn more if they can discover and talk to other students.

Other commentators on the supervision process have drawn attention to the fact that supervisors, in the process of assessing students' performance, often move beyond the estimation of core competencies and levels to more nebulous personal characteristics, as Morgan and Sprenkle suggest. Both explicit and implicit views on the appropriateness of this vary. On the one hand, it may be seen as an acceptable and healthy antidote to a strict adherence to technocratic techniques concerned only with outcomes and efficiency. On the other hand, there is some uneasiness about the apparent lack of objective and consistent criteria and also that those that are employed are not clearly stated, if at all, as part of performance assessment.

Bogo, Regehr, Woodford, Hughes, Power and Regehr (2006, p.582), in a study of field instructors' descriptions of student performance, write of their consistent tendency to move beyond 'relatively narrow confines of competencies' to discuss students' personal qualities such as 'maturity, initiative, energy, independence, responsiveness to others and commitment.'

Eisenberg, Heycox and Hughes (1996, p.38) appear at least as sanguine when they state that:

'The personal' is integral to the very premise of field educators' assessment of student competence. To evaluate competence field educators use their 'personal' standards as much as they use the official university ones. They refer in their assessment as much to the student's personal characteristics as their professional skills, and they perceive growth in competence as both 'personal' and professional.

Given what is known about the strength of personal values, doubts about the possibility and desirability of 'objectivity' and the importance attached in the School to reflective practice, there needs to be an acceptance of the fact that some estimation of personal qualities as well as achievement of practice standards at an acceptable level and satisfactory completion of other formal field assignments will be used in the assessment of placement performance. This needs to be discussed between FEOs and Field Educators so that there is some consensus reached on acceptable practice in this area. And this needs to be explained to students prior to placement.

Overall, the literature is conclusive in presenting the field practicum as beneficial to all parties involved and as being considerably significant in preparing students for professional practice. Barton, Bell and Bowles (2005, p.311) state that:

The results of this research indicate that the benefits of practicum to host agencies outweigh the costs. Supervisors in this study reported positive outcomes for themselves, their employing agency, service users, the universities and the student. Students on placement perform valuable work for their agencies and placement often serves as a prelude to employment. Practicum also makes an important contribution to supervisors' professional development, including understanding new theory and encouraging reflective practice. An important element in this process is the ongoing relationship that practitioners establish with universities.

Critical Tasks for Field Educators

Field Educators undertake a range of tasks in assisting student learning and development during placement. Some information on the more important ones is provided here to supplement the material in the Course Information handbook, specifically from the perspective of a Field Educator.

Student Assessment

Contributions to student teaching, assessment and passing or failing courses are shared between students, Field Educators and university staff. The constructive contribution of Field Educators is essential to ensure that appropriate competence standards and indicators are in place and are met and recognised. However, the final decision on successful completion of the field education program rests with the university, through the Manager of Field Education.

Specific assessment expectations of the Field Educator include:

- Identifying appropriate learning opportunities;
- Monitoring the student's progress and providing feedback;
- Helping the student to link practice and theory;
- Completing final assessment reports.

Assessment is an on-going process which is both formal and informal. Field Educators are required to assist with various assessment tasks with the student and these are written in the Learning Plan.. At the same time, Field Educators should use appropriate opportunities to discuss work issues with the student and to give informal feedback. Frequently, the best time for this to occur and to promote active learning is immediately after some client or other work-related involvement. Students should also actively seek opportunities to engage in this process, both with the nominated Field Educator and with other agency staff when an appropriate occasion arises.

There are benefits to the Field Educator and student for students observing and working with other staff from time to time. In student placement, Durkin and Shergill (2000) strongly advocate a team approach, arguing, however, that its value and likely success are reduced if the social work team in an agency is not involved in and committed to the placement. They point to many of the learning advantages to the student of joint working with other than the practice teacher (p.171). It enables the student to draw on the team's full resources and different methodologies (p.172). They claim (p.167):

In the context of practice teaching, the contribution of other team members can benefit the student in greater proportion than the sum of the individual input.

Durkin and Shergill state that a team approach requires careful preparation and planning. Pre-placement meetings and agreements (contracts) are essential in the process. Hopkins and Cooper (2000, p.67) suggest that a fieldwork contract needs to state clearly:

- Learning objectives and outcomes;
- Assessment criteria or performance indicators;
- Evidence required to demonstrate competence;
- How evidence will be gathered;
- How assessment judgments will be made on the evidence.

Student Supervision

Clearly, one of the major functions of formal supervision is to work with the student in assessing his/her performance, identifying strengths, actual and potential, and areas where further work, both theoretical and experiential, is indicated. The AASW requires ninety minutes of formal supervision for every 35 hours in the field. At least half of this formal supervision must be on an individual basis.

Supervision sessions should be properly organised and conducted. They should be at a convenient, agreed and preferably uninterrupted time, in a designated and private location. They are a time for

student and Field Educator to review progress, to reflect critically on placement experience and issues and to set other learning tasks or directions. In addition to the assessment tasks listed above, Field Educators are responsible for:

- Orienting and settling the student into the agency;
- Assisting as necessary with ongoing student/agency/staff adjustment;
- Negotiating with the student in the preparation of the Field Education Learning Plan, including learning goals;
- Providing the student with an appropriate number and range of activities and tasks;
- Liaising with FELOs and fulfilling all supervisory requirements, including scheduled agency visits, completion of the mid-placement report and the submission of a final placement report, in conjunction with the student;
- Participating actively in the formal assessment process.

There is a need for university staff and agencies to be sensitive to some of the broader concerns of students about field placements. Maidment (2003, p.2) suggests that emphasis needs to be placed on how to survive and negotiate in workplace cultures as well as on interviewing and assessing clients. Curriculum should cover issues of worker safety, stress management and understanding agency context and work environment (p.6). She further argues that, while primary responsibility for student safety rests with the university:

In order to ensure that students are supported in this learning, placement field educators play a critical role in alerting and sensitising students to issues of safety and managing stress in the field. Experienced workers supervising students are in a potent position to model, educate and support students in establishing and maintaining safe work practices and balanced lives.

Field Educators should ensure that students are fully informed about important health and safety issues and the agency's policies and practices. Ideally, this should form part of pre-placement discussions and be reinforced in early supervision.

Portfolios

Placement students in most courses are required to complete a portfolio of written and verbal items linking their work on placement with the theory and knowledge they have learned at UniSA. Field Educators are not expected to assist student with this. The tutor of the Action Learning Set will help with this. They are an aid to reflective practice and as an important learning tool/accomplishment in their own right. The preparation and presentation of a body of work contained in a portfolio also serve other important functions. They encourage students to link practice and theory, to integrate or make connections between different learning experiences and to think about actions and ideas in a critical and perhaps creative way. Gambrell (1997, p.1260) emphasises the centrality of critical thinking to effective intervention. She states:

Critical thinking involves clearly describing and taking responsibility for our claims and arguments, critically evaluating our views no matter how cherished, and considering

alternative views ... Critical thinking encourages us to examine the context in which problems occur (e.g. to connect private troubles with public issues), to view questions from different points of view, to identify and question our assumptions, and to consider the possible consequences of different beliefs or actions.

Portfolios enable students to present tangible evidence of work accomplished, skills employed and theoretical support for action.

Students are encouraged to explore their professional beliefs, actively draw on knowledge to inform practice and take action consistent with these.

While all students will not reach this level of sophistication, all should be able to derive a sense of achievement from work which they have undertaken, recorded and analysed in some form and presented to professional mentors.

A Field Educator is a significant mentor and has an exceptional opportunity to gain particular and accurate insight into a student's learning and development through discussions about portfolio inclusions and analysis. Portfolios belong to students and will only be shared on their terms but a willingness to do so will indicate a trusting relationship, emerging self-efficacy and growing confidence in the placement context.

Action Learning Set, Tutorials and Tutors

In some course these are known as Action Learning Sets and in others as tutorials. Students are required to attend regular sessions at Magill campus as part of their field practicum. In the social work programs 14 hours of tutorials are counted as placement time. The purpose of the meetings is to enable students to discuss their placement experiences and share learning in a confidential setting.

These meetings are conducted by experienced and qualified social work practitioners. These practitioners attend the mid placement interviews and are the first point of contact for Field Educators regarding a specific student. This provides an effective link between field experience and tutorial analysis for those students.

Tutorials involve intensive deliberation on theory and practice. As part of this learning, students use a learning tool which is an analysis of skills, theories and standards applied in intervention and other activities.

External Supervision

On occasions, students undertake placements in an agency where there is no qualified social worker, as stipulated by the AASW.

These students are provided with external teaching and supervision by AASW eligible practitioners at the university. Supervision sessions are held fortnightly (in the opposite week to the tutorials) throughout the placement, including the mid-study period break. Students are required to attend to pass the course.

Teaching and Support for Field Educators

Seminars

Field Education staff members run seminars each year for Field Educators at Magill campus. The purpose of the seminars is to provide information about the academic content of the social work and related programs and their relationship to the field practicum, the nature and responsibilities of the Field Educator role and support available from FELOs and others. They also provide an opportunity for Field Educators to meet each other and university staff and to discuss common issues and concerns.

School/Agency contact

The school maintains contact with students through individual placement planning meetings and fortnightly tutorials on campus once placements commence.

Formal contact with agencies and Field Educators occur at the mid-placement and final reviews which are described in the Course Information handbook for students. The mid-placement review entails a visit from the School and a presentation which is led by the student. Contact with the agency and Field Educator at the time of the student's final review is by letter, recognising the university's appreciation of their contribution to student learning and professional standards.

The School may be contacted at other times by Field Educators for advice and/or assistance. A staff member may choose to visit an agency in response to this contact for discussions with the Field Educator and/or the student on placement, depending on the nature of the issue(s) raised. The School should be contacted by Field Educators in a timely manner if problems arise which may adversely affect the outcome of the placement.

SECTION 4

BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENTS

Introduction

This section offers some guidelines on the conduct of placements. It is not prescriptive. While there are some common elements and parameters, each placement is unique. Field Educators have different strengths and interests, agencies have different functions and ideologies, students have different learning needs. But the key to success overall is planning.

The responsibility for successful placements is obviously shared between the university, Field Educators and students. The value of the field practicum to learning and the establishment of a professional identity has been widely acknowledged. At the same time, there is recognition that placements have the potential to undermine students' capacity to work effectively and confidently. Maidment (2003, p.2) surveyed 39 Victorian social work students on placement. Of the total number, about a third were verbally abused by clients and just under two thirds experienced considerable work-related stress. None of this may be attributable of course to a lack of sound planning and diligent attention to students' learning and development but it illustrates the need for effective engagement between Field Educators and students at all stages of the field practicum.

Many writers (Beddoe in Cooper & Briggs (eds), 2000; Davys & Beddoe, 2000; Tsui, 2005; Cleak & Wilson, 2007) find it useful to analyse the social work field practicum in terms of stages which are described in fairly consistent terms.

Davys and Beddoe (2000, p.439) point to the tripartite responsibilities of fieldwork supervisors (Field Educators), an educative role in relation to the social work school, a supervisory role in relation to the agency and an educative/supervisory role in relation to the student. They suggest that the resultant tensions can be managed more effectively by employing 'a map of supervisory tasks'. We have adapted this map according to the specific content and structure of field education and present it below as a useful audit in organising and conducting field placements.

MAP OF FIELD EDUCATOR TASKS

STAGE 1: PRE-PLACEMENT PROCESS- PREPARATION

- Consider:*
- Your personal value base
 - The theories which shape your practice
 - The methods you use in your work
 - Your personal availability and responsiveness to student supervision
 - Your understanding of students and the pressures of the student role
- Identify:*
- The School's expectations of you and the student
 - The learning opportunities offered by your agency
 - The resources needed to accommodate the student
- Prepare:*
- An orientation plan for the student
- Negotiate:*
- Placement expectations with student

STAGE 2: LEARNING PLAN - BEGINNING

- Negotiate:*
- The learning plan with the student
 - Establish clear learning goals and objectives related to needs
 - Establish clear tasks
 - Match tasks with learning opportunities
 - Specify methods of evaluation
- Explore:*
- Expectations and difference with student
- Formalise:*
- A contract for supervision of the student's work
- Prepare:*
- Suitable work for the student

STAGE 3: MID-PLACEMENT REPORT AND MEETING- MIDDLE

- Engage:*
- In the work of the field placement
- Provide:*
- Formal and informal supervision
 - The student with ongoing assessment of his/her work
- Prepare:*
- For mid-point review
- Maintain:*
- The supervision relationship

STAGE 4: FINAL REPORT- ENDING

- Engage:*
- In the work of the field placement
- Maintain:*
- The supervision relationship
- Assist:*
- The student to complete his/her work in the agency
- Evaluate:*
- The student's work and the achievement of learning goals
- Contribute to:*
- A written placement report
- Provide:*
- A planned opportunity for the student to complete the placement and say his/her farewells
- Conclude:*
- The supervision relationship on a mutual exchange basis

Note: the process stages used here do not completely match the assessment stages.

The map is adapted from Davys & Beddoe 2000, p.441.

Selective Commentary on the Broad Placement Stages

Preparation (1)

Preparation before the placement commences is essential. It involves both self-preparation by the Field Educator and agency preparation. Self-preparation includes scrutiny of values and skills, strengths and limitations as a practitioner. Davys and Beddoe (2000, p.440) describe the process as 'an articulation of professional identity'. This preparation should also include close consideration of the student's learning needs as expressed so far and how these can best be responded to by the Field Educator and the agency. Durkin and Shergill (2000, p.168) cite Preston-Shoot in claiming that pre-placement meetings and agreements 'facilitate informed choice and participation'.

Agency preparation requires the creation of a receptive climate, discussing the placement with colleagues to ensure their support and commitment and capacity to share placement tasks, contributing from their specific roles and expertise. Attention needs to be given to practical issues, such as student accommodation and resources and how Field Educator absences, planned and unplanned, will be covered. Particular consideration should be devoted to the demands and tensions created by the contemporary profile of the student body which is characterised by part-time placements, combinations of study, work, family and placement commitments and a mixture of mature-age and school-leaver students (Durkin & Shergill, 2000; Davys & Beddoe, 2000). Clearly defined strategies will be required to provide the optimum learning environment for a student with his/her specific situation and placement focus, within the constraints imposed by agency, community and client group interests.

Beginning Stage - Getting Started (2)

This stage is critical in finalising the student's learning contract and negotiating the 'working details' of the placement. What work is to be allocated and how is it to be undertaken, recorded and reported on? What are the expectations of the Field Educator and the student? How will assessment of the student, particularly in relation to practice standards and portfolio material, be conducted? What are the arrangements for formal supervision?

Middle Stage - Extending the Learning (3)

It is at this stage of a placement, after about 6 to 8 weeks, that problems may begin to emerge. The novelty of the situation for the student has diminished. Enthusiasm for placement tasks and social work itself may wane. Doubts about competence and particularly the ability to integrate theory and practice may arise. It is important, therefore, that the Field Educator is alert to these possibilities and, if they occur, is prepared to address them with the student in an open and supportive manner.

It is at this time that clarification and reflection should be encouraged. Davys and Beddoe (2000, pp.443-4) suggest the employment of a supervision model which allows the student to retain ownership of his/her work but also allows the fieldwork supervisor (Field Educator) to critique and affirm.

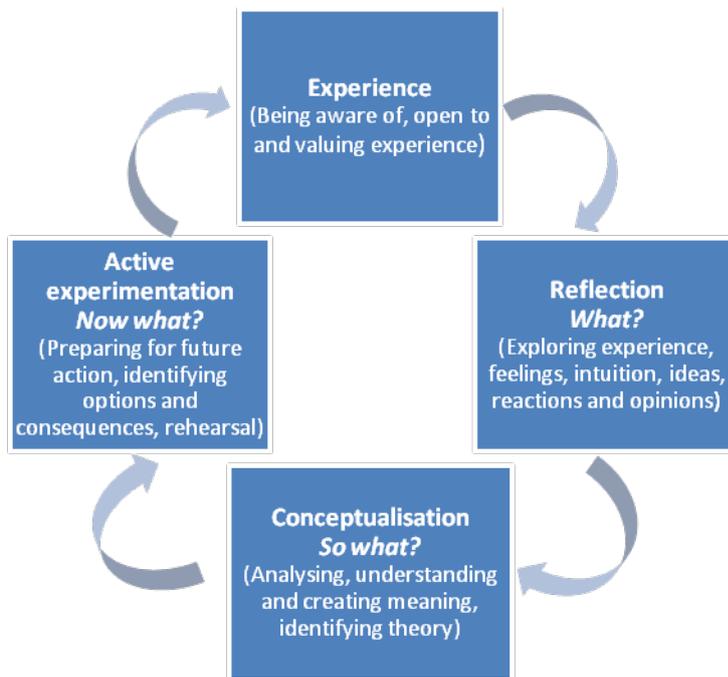


Fig 2: Source: Davys & Beddoe 2000, p.444.
 Experiential learning cycle (see Kolb, 1984; Bond & Holland, 1998; Morrison, 1993).

Tsang (2006) illuminates the myriad examples of dialectics (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) in social work practice, teaching and learning. He uses the analogy (2006, p.274) of a bridge to describe the student/ practice teacher relationship. Ideally, it is a reciprocal relationship in which learning flows in two directions, rather than one being divided between expert and novice. Tsang also alludes to the significance of both cognition and emotion in social work education, echoing Davys and Bardoe's (2000, p.439) reference to the 'artistry of the field supervisor relationship.' This in turn is reminiscent of Tyler's (1952, p.52) old but classic definition of a profession. He contends:

For an occupation to be a profession it should involve complex tasks which are performed by artistic application of major principles and concepts rather than by routine operations or skills. This is an important differentiating feature. A skilled trade, obviously, involves some fairly complex tasks, but the members of the trade are able to perform these tasks through acquiring certain routine skills and through following certain specified rules. Many of the problems encountered by a member of a profession are in a certain sense unique. To solve such a problem he must draw upon certain basic principles. However, the application of these principles necessitates an analysis of the particular problem to see what are its unique aspects which will require adaptation of the principles. This adaptation is an artistic task; that is, it involves individual judgment and imagination as well as skill.

It may be contended that Tyler's statement goes to the heart of the contemporary rational-technocratic/reflective practice debate and that not all social workers meet his criteria of a professional worker.

In all of this, there is recognition of the inconsistencies, ambiguities and contradictions inherent in social work practice and the centrality of reflective practice in confronting them. Cleak and Wilson (2007, p.51) suggest that a critical reflective approach is linked to a solution-focused rather than a

problem-focused approach to learning. Its emphasis is on engaging with the learner and concentrating on strengths. This approach recognises the student as the expert in his/her own learning, views supervision as a mutual learning experience, tries to depersonalise any problems faced by the student, focuses on student capacity and is oriented towards future possibilities. Critical reflection is important because it seeks to dissect a person's construction of reality, implicit or overt, and its particular assumptions (2007, p.52).

Davys and Beddoe (2000, p.449) advocate supervision which is based as much on reflective as prescriptive methodology; it is process -focused rather than task and content-focused, with relationship building and maintenance as a constant thread.

While the middle of a placement may allow doubts and difficulties to emerge, it is also the most opportune time to extend the student's learning and to affirm competence as an emerging professional worker. Extension does not refer to an increase in work, although this may well occur, but rather to a higher degree of sophistication, embracing sound judgement, critical analysis and balanced decision-making. It reflects instances of theoretical understanding being informed by practice realities and is indicative of growing 'practice wisdom'. In analysing the nature of 'a critical, accountable and knowledge-based practice wisdom', O'Sullivan (2005, p.237) cites Goldstein's (1993) third of three postulated stages of changing attitudes to knowledge as follows:

Where the learner acknowledges the need to abandon the search for ultimate truth, but not the need to pursue understanding. The learner appreciates that reality is known only in subjective terms, and personal constructs about the world are therefore always uncertain and problematical. Inquiry is therefore an ongoing, flexible and open process (adapted from Fook et al., 2000: 218).

Durkin and Shergill (2000, p.170) consider that 'the student's own life experiences have to be validated, acknowledged and used in the learning process' for practice teaching to be successful, mirroring Cleak and Wilson's earlier observations.

There appears to be an emerging consensus that reflection needs to extend beyond the confines of individual cases, in the context of agency function and community setting, important as these are. Durkin and Shergill (2000, p.170) state that students must be encouraged to take a 'view of professionalism' not as neutral, but as taking sides to challenge sometimes oppressive practices. Drury-Hudson (1999, p.166) suggests that reflection in supervision is generally focused on the micro level in practice and could be broadened to include the macro context of social, organisational, political and economic influences. Similarly, Maidment and Cooper (2002, p.406), in a study of field education supervision sessions, found that issues of difference were not addressed overtly in structural terms to include aspects of power, inequity, oppression or exclusion.

Ending (4)

This stage is often subject to considerable pressure on both student and Field Educator to finalise assignments for assessment and to complete the final evaluation. It is a period of review, when the accomplishments and the difficulties of the placement are assessed and balanced and future possibilities foreshadowed. It is both recapitulation and mapping the future. In addition to evaluating the learning experience, the student divests him/herself of relationships which have been

established in and through the agency. Although relatively brief, these relationships are often quite profound and have a lasting significance. As Patricia Lager (2004, p.3) observes, the name of a person's first field instructor is much more likely to be remembered than the name of the first course lecturer or tutor.

The management of the final phase of the placement, therefore, whether it is judged successful or unsuccessful, is extremely important. Even when it is adjudged to have been unsuccessful, it is highly likely that the student will have made at least some gains in personal and professional development and this needs to be acknowledged.

Supervision Sessions

In many respects, the supervision session is a microcosm of the stages represented above, although again there is no precise synchronisation. Nor is there any prescriptive intent here but the proposed structure (based on Davys and Beddoe's article) may provide a useful guide.

- **Beginning:** Here, the student describes the work undertaken.
- **Clarification:** This is sought by the Field Educator in terms of what occurred, what issues have been identified and why they have been selected above others.
- **Reflection:** The supervisor encourages the student to focus on meaning and impact, to identify feelings that were provoked and how they were dealt with, the learning that occurred, any broader societal and policy issues, and structural issues related to class and power. (Davys & Beddoe, 2000, p.447.)
- **Evaluation:** This is an explicit linking of the practice experience to theory, a dialogue on the concepts identified and/or challenged by the practice experience.
- **Implementation:** This focuses on action plans and the integration of new learning.
- **Conclusion:** A review of the session and its value to student and Field Educator.
- **Ending:** A summary of overall progress and a delineation of future tasks.

SECTION 5

PLACEMENT CHALLENGES

Student Difficulties

Inevitably, there are occasions when a student experiences difficulties with a placement for a variety of reasons, ranging from personal problems to issues with learning and the standard of practice required or with agency expectations or supervision practices. These may necessitate a re-negotiation of arrangements, variation to placement time-frames, additional support or, in some cases, termination of the placement.

In all cases, early intervention is desirable. Wherever possible, the Field Educators should try to resolve the situation with the student without any outside intervention. The Field Education staff team, however, are available for consultation with both the student and Field Educator and they should be contacted if concerns persist on either side.

Where the difficulties are related principally to the student's performance, it may be possible for the School, Field Educator and student to devise a plan to address the situation. If there is concern at the mid placement interview that a student may not pass the course the university representative will coordinate a written action plan which outlines steps to be taken to address the problems. In this process, a student must be accorded full procedural fairness, decisions made must be in writing and endorsed by all parties, with a date for review and finalisation. In many, if not most, instances, this procedure will resolve issues satisfactorily. Where this does not occur, the placement may be terminated by the Course Coordinator. The Field education staff team in the School will then work with the student regarding future options.

Failing a Student

Recommending failure is one of the most difficult decisions for field educators and most stressful for all parties. In contemplating the failure of a student in field education, the following principles are to be upheld:

- The interests of clients and potential clients are paramount and take precedence over personal and organisational interests;
- Nevertheless and additionally, however, the reputation of the agency, social work profession and the university need to be safeguarded;
- In any action taken, the student must be given full procedural fairness and every opportunity to learn from mistakes in a constructive way.

Behaviour likely to lead to failure in field education may be broadly categorised as academic or non-academic (Koerin & Miller, 1995). Non-academic behaviour comprises illegal activities, whether work-related or not. It also comprises any breach of professional and/or agency standards, such as failure to adhere to the AASW Code of Ethics, to meet a duty of care or to observe agency policies

and practices. The behaviour may constitute negligence or misconduct. A clear exception to this, however, is where agency practices themselves are unethical, oppressive or discriminatory and a student takes legitimate action to bring this to notice.

Academic grounds for failure are more common and probably more clear-cut. They arise when a student has difficulty in achieving the requisite level of competence in his/her work or certain areas of work and/or in demonstrating this with appropriate documentation and compliance with assessment requirements.

There is a fourth area of concern which is more difficult to categorise but which we define as non-academic. A student may be seen as unfit for the profession because of an inability to form relationships or through being regarded as too rigid or judgemental; alternatively, relationships may be seen as inappropriate and behaviour as immature and lacking sound judgement. This whole area may be seen as more subjective and difficult to identify and address. Nevertheless, as indicated in the section on student assessment, we regard these concerns as potentially acceptable as long as there is an agreed level of substantiation and consistent standards which have been previously endorsed in principle by School staff and Field Educators.

When the possibility of failure arises and the Field Educator and/or student consider that outside assistance is required, it is presumed that there will be some preliminary contact with the University representative by telephone or in person. If the student has been identified as not meeting or likely to meet the required standards by the end of the placement then the University representative will advise the Course Coordinator and an action plan will be initiated developed by the School.

If the matters then require formal intervention, however, the concerns must be presented to the School staff member fully and in writing so that a proper and transparent process can be initiated. This may result in a decision to fail a student immediately which can only be made by the Course Coordinator, in accordance with course requirements and university procedures.

In most instances, however, there will be consultation involving the student, Field Educators, and University representative to consider a number of options. Meetings and decisions will be minuted and endorsed by all parties. Options to resolve the situation include counselling, a work plan to address identified deficiencies, extension of the placement, any other steps deemed appropriate or any combination of these. A final option is withdrawal from the placement, with or without failure. Where it is without failure, the Field Education staff team in the School will determine the student's eligibility for an alternative placement in the future and any remedial action which is required.

SECTION 6

PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

Timing of Field Education

Social Work

Field Education placements are scheduled in semester 1 for third year BSW and BSS students and semester 2 for fourth year BSW, second placement BSS and Master's students. Each 'full-time' placement is approximately 13 weeks duration for five days a week, based on a seven and a half hour day. The total number of hours for each placement is 500. This meets the Australian Association of Social Workers' requirement that students spend a minimum of 1000 hours in at least two placements. Placements generally begin on the first day of each university study period and continue for a minimum of 13 weeks or until the end of the study period. Negotiated arrangements with agencies based on agency needs and/or student needs may vary starting and finishing dates as well as number of hours per week on placement. Changes to standard start dates must be approved by the University.

A minimum of 22.5 hours per week must be completed in Field Education placements.

Mid-semester breaks do not apply during placements. Time spent away from placement due to illness or public holidays must be made up to ensure that the designated hours are completed on placement.

The process for organizing Field Education placements actually begins in the study period preceding the placement.

Social Sciences

Field Education placements are scheduled in semester 1 for BSS students on their first placement and semester 2 for second placement BSS students. Placement one is 200 hours and placement two is 300 hours. Each 'full-time' placement is between 2-5 days a week, based on a seven and a half hour day.

Student Accommodation and Resources

It is anticipated that agencies will ensure that students are made to feel welcome and be properly introduced to other staff on their first day by the Field Educator, in addition to being shown agency facilities and having access arrangements explained to them.

It is understood that most agencies will not be in a position to provide a student with an office; sometimes, even a personal desk will not be available. However, a student should have an identified space in which to work and to store papers and other work material, access to a computer and telephone and to other office equipment such as photocopying machines, printers, etc.

Students should be provided with clear information about agency policies and procedures, including those for claiming out of pocket expenses, to enable them to contribute effectively to the agency's

work and to practice efficiently. They need to be given advice on agency resources which are available, such as motor vehicles and stationery, and again how to access them.

Most importantly, students should be informed about work health and safety requirements and procedures and how to report and record any incident with any actual or potential insurance claim action.

It is also important that students are aware of back-up support avenues in case of Field Educator absence or unavailability.

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