

# Focusing on professional growth; the experiences of external social work supervisors in field education

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*Celebrating*  
**40**  
YEARS  
1970~2010

# Presentation Overview

- Context of Research
- Back ground Information
- Method
- Findings
- Discussion
- Questions
- References

# Context of Research

- Explorative Qualitative research.
- Subset of data
- Research question: *‘What are the experiences of all key stakeholders in field education with external supervision?’*.
  - Focus of this presentation: External Field Educators
  - Prior Presentation on the Importance of Context

## Field education is pivotal yet challenging

- Defining moment ([Homonoff, 2008](#)),
- Complex
  - Sense of self([Lam, Wong, & Leung, 2005](#))
  - Unsafe([Gair & Thomas, 2008](#)),
  - Learning and stress([Maidment, 2006](#)).
- Autonomy and professional growth
- Field educators= respectful, communication, available, observation([Barretti, 2007](#))
- Workload issues impact([Chinnery & Beddoe, 2011](#)).

## Neoliberalism is impacting field education

- De-professionalisation of social work ([Healy, 2004](#); [Morley & Dunstan, 2013](#)),
- heavy workloads/ extra responsibilities of field educators ([Moriarty et al., 2009](#)),
- less worker autonomy ([Chenoweth, 2012](#))
- limit ability to support students ([Barton, Bell, & Bowles, 2005](#)).

Changing field + difficulties to place students with on-site supervisors

## External supervision in field education

- Apprenticeship type model([Camilleri, 2001](#))
- Limited placements with social work professional on-site ([Barton, et al., 2005](#)).
- require effective triad relationships ([Abram, Hartung, & Wernet, 2000](#)) good matching processes and role clarifications ([Zuchowski, 2013](#)), collaboration and planning between supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013b), and extra supports, training and recognition for the task supervisors ([Henderson, 2010](#))
- Placement with external supervision can open up new field of practice ([Zuchowski, 2011](#)), provide a broad range of experiences in emerging community organisations ([Abram, et al., 2000](#)), and result in employable and flexible graduates ([Plath, 2003](#)).

## External supervision in field education

- seen as a last resort ([Abram, et al., 2000](#))
- students, may be more satisfied in placements with internal supervision ([Cleak & Smith, 2012](#))
- Internally vs externally supervision or other issues?
  - Learning? Supports? Preparation? Messages? ([Zuchowski, 2013](#)).
- Challenges:
  - social work roles, valuing task supervisor, four way process of assessment and reporting ([Plath, 2003](#)).
  - Context ([Henderson, 2010](#), Zuchowski, 2013b).

## Supervision in field education

- Important: professional growth ([AASW, 2012](#)) and competence ([Lizzio & Wilson, 2002](#)), critical reflection ([Morley & Dunstan, 2013](#)) transformative learning ([Carroll, 2010](#)).
- Not politically innocent ([Adamson, 2012](#))
- Compatibility ([Ornstein & Moses, 2010](#))
- Quality of relationship= success of supervision ([McMahon, 2002](#))

Thus, in placements with external supervision:

*Professional formation? Impact on the field?  
What is supervision covering?*



# Method

## Sample

- Purposive Sampling
- Eligibility Criteria: Social Work students, field educators, task supervisors and liaison persons that have been involved in social work field placements with external social work supervision.
- 32 participants
- Range of Australian universities
  - Qld, ACT, WA, Vic and SA
- **Focus in this presentation: the experiences of external supervisors**
  - 15 participants

Table 1: Participants: Years Working in the Human Services Field and Number of occasions participant has provided supervision to social work student, internally and externally.

Name (1)	Years of Experience since graduating as a Social Worker	Number of occasions provided Internal social work supervision	Number of times provided external social work supervision
Paul	40	many	many
Wayne	35	many	many
Robert	31	many	many
Georgina	30	many	many
Anna	30	20	a few
Matthew	28	many	multiple
Ralph	28	several	1
Bridget	20	many	3-4
Maria	20	many	many
Iona	20	some	many
Chloe	15	1	1
Belinda	13	16	multiple
Karen	10	Many	couple
Shelly	10	nil	a few
Tanya	5	nil	couple

(1) Pseudonyms have been used throughout the presentation

## Qualitative Research: semi-structured interviews

- 6 face-to face, 9 phone interviews
- Explorative interview
  - Field education with external supervision
- 10 female and 5 male participants

## Data analysis

- Taped, transcribed
- Themes and subthemes identified
- Nvivo
- Current reflection on interim analysis

## Qualitative Research

- Subjective experiences, self-selection and self-reporting
- One aspect of a range of experiences
- Insider positioning of researcher

# Findings

- Separate Presentation: Contextual understanding of placement, Matching and resourcing
- Opportunities
- Challenges
- Relationships and Space
- Supervision and Growth

# Opportunities

- Growth for students
  - Open reflections
  - Separate space

*Because I do think that there is a real benefit to having somebody completely outside, with the perception of impartiality, which is really good for the student. Shelly*

- Fresh perspectives
- supervision actually happening

*Because my feeling is that the students that are getting external supervision are generally getting at least more consistent supervision when they get it and are better supported on placement and I think that says more about the changing of the sector than it does about whether or not social workers on site give supervision. Iona*

- Growth for field and participants
  - Modelling supervision
  - Growing field

*it is a good opportunity to put the focus of what skills a competent social worker has back into that work place, and also for other grass roots agencies, that, have developed out of a good idea to again show the skills that social work can contribute. Robert*

- Professional growth
- Learn, keep active, connect with profession

*you are learning all the time. That's why I still enjoy at 70 supervision, because you are always learning from the student, ... it keeps your bloody mind active Matthew*  
*when I took on my first student for external supervision, ..., and I really wanted to maintain my connections with the profession. Iona*

# Challenges

- No visual observation
  - context (Zuchowski 2013 b)
- Busyness of task supervisors
- Understanding of social work
- Hierarchy in organisation

***The nature of the changes in the non-Government sector, which is most where students are having external supervision, has increasingly placed the sector and the staff under enormous pressure and so there is less time for students*** Chloe

***students have to manage senior people who do not have an understanding of social work... the task supervisor who knows their agency well, but may not understand or appreciate what social work does particularly in that organisation'***. Georgina

- Getting two different opinions

***'... there was miscommunication happening and that put the student in an awkward position because they were getting different messages from their task supervisor and my expectations of what was happening , wasn't actually happening'. Karen***

***...you have got two opinions, the answer is yours, but they all wanting us to be really concrete. 'Robert***

- Being played off

***I think if you don't provide that private space I have seen it happen that the student plays one against the other... I have seen supervisors actually fall out and if they have had the opportunity to actually work more as a team, that wouldn't have happened. Shelly***

-----Private Space



# Relationships and Space

- Important

*So it's about having these relationships and conversations happen and we are walking closely, you know, not right beside each other, but we are not going completely in different directions. Karen*

- Builder of individual relationships

*So I always contact first off and I just say hi and I am, you know, it would be good and meet, to have a chat , to get to know each other Matthew*

- Meetings, Private Space and Communication between supervisors

*And I may have said like... in my role as a professional supervisor, I just want to really concentrate on the critical reflective practice, and around social work values, I may have said that to alleviate [name of task supervisor]'s fears, like the task supervisor's fears, maybe. Tanya*

*I think it would be beneficial for them, I think eventually you would have the student and the liaison person involved as well, but, very early on, ... **just to have that discussion and to know what perspective** they are both coming from as well. Because I think if you are an external supervisor you could give be giving some guidance to students, maybe about something they could be doing in the work place, but **If you are not having a discussion with the task supervisor about the applicability of that, then it go all pear shaped** Bridget*

*I think both, there needs to be the opportunity for a **private...space to kind of form a team approach**, ... and then involve the student and have those honest or robust discussions... or difficult discussions if they are necessary, Shelly*

# Supervision and growth

- Teaching and Coaching

*'...training, coaching, listening, its largely facilitating, it's promoting people's professional or psychological growth within a discipline'*. Ralph

- Progress practice frameworks

*What you are attempting to do is to give, you want that person to develop as bold professionally and personally, so that as they can be a, an effective practitioner.*

Matthew

Looking at what they are doing every day and how they are going about it and putting frameworks around that and helping them to get encouraged and them putting their own frameworks around why I am doing that? Why am I doing, what am I learning out of this, what theoretical, what I have learned in the classroom I am translating into the face to face contact with the client Georgina

- Social Work Component

- Feedback from social workers

*It is just an opportunity to say, well look as a social worker this is the feedback ,... just relating it back to social work knowledge, which people from other disciplines can't do. ... and it is not that this [practice by non-social workers] is a bad way, but it is just what we need to do is highlight, well, what is the social work contribution to this? And how is it different from what you are getting from the task supervisor? Maria*

- Task Supervisors: participation in assessment, observation of practice, organisational knowledge

*The two task supervisors are the most experienced community workers around here, so who am I after four, five years to take a more lead in that? Like I like to think that this is disrespectful. That's what they do. That's what their experience is. That's why we have placements in those organisations, because that's what they bring. Tanya*

# Discussion

- Space, time and relationships
- Busyness of task supervisors.... Valuable model?
  - Cost shift?
- Differing messages
  - Relationships, space and time
- Focus on professional formation and growth of student
  - Lack of social work context otherwise
  - Fitting AASW expectations



Thank you for your time and  
interest

Are there any Questions or  
Comments?

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