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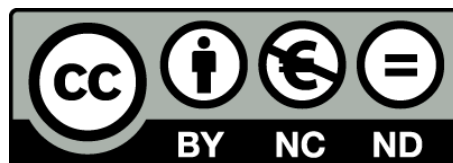
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Being the university: Liaison persons' reflections on placements with off-site supervision

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**Brief Biographical Note**

Ms Ines Zuchowski finished her Bachelor of Social Work in 1992 and has worked as a social worker in various roles since then. Ines is currently employed as a Lecturer in Field Education at James Cook University. She has completed Postgraduate Certificates in Tertiary Education and Research Methods. Ines is enrolled in a PhD, focusing on Social Work Field Education with External Supervision. Ines can be contacted via email, [Ines.zuchowski@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Ines.zuchowski@jcu.edu.au).

Abstract

Social work as a profession, social work practitioners and organisations, as well as social work educators are under strain due to global, economic, social and political changes and workplace pressures. Field education is recognised as pivotal in preparing social work students for professional practice. As social work practitioners, organisations and social work educators are exposed to external and internal pressures, social work practice learning with off-site supervision is becoming more prevalent.

This paper reports on research that explored the experiences of key stakeholders in social work practice learning with external or, in other words, off-site supervision. This paper explores the experiences of university liaison persons who provided supported field education arrangements with off-site supervision. A range of themes have emerged, including reflections about bringing the university to the placement experience, creating student centred placement opportunities, the complexity of connecting the various players, and the extra support and resources needed to support placements with off-site supervision. Findings suggest that quality learning experiences are about more than modes of supervision, that placements with off-site supervision increase the workload of liaison persons and that clear models and structures need to be developed to support emerging

field education models.

Key Words: Social Work Education; Field Education; Practicum; Liaison Person: Learning; Critical Reflection; Neoliberalism;

### Introduction

Social work placements with off-site supervision are becoming a common feature in the Australian education system. While traditionally an apprenticeship model where the social work student follows and is closely supervised by an on-site social worker has been the norm (Camilleri, 2001), current contexts of the social welfare field and the large number and range of locations of social work degrees and students mean that a significant number of social work placements are now supported by off-site social work supervisors (Barton, Bell, & Bowles, 2005; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010). In the current neo-liberal context human service workplaces and staff are under strain; for example, social work is characterised by organisational and client associated factors such as limited discretionary powers, high and complex case loads, lack of managerial support, increased accountability requirements that are contributing to social work stress (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcombe, 2012). And although social work students can bring benefits to an organisation (Barton, et al., 2005), there can be a reluctance by social workers to provide field education opportunities to students (Morley & Dunstan, 2013).

Concurrently, the Australian tertiary education system is experiencing funding cuts and an emphasis on producing income through grants and research, resulting in difficulties for social work schools to support field education programs appropriately (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). This paper explores the experiences of liaison persons supporting social work students in placements with off-site supervision. While identified as important contributors to social work field education (AASW, 2012a), liaison persons' views and experiences have attracted little research attention.

Off-site supervision refers to supervision provided by qualified social workers, the field educators, who are external to the agency in which the student undertakes the field education. Generally, the field educators come on site to provide the social work supervision. The work-based supervisors are most likely not social work qualified and are generally supporting students through task supervision. Liaison persons are academic staff of tertiary institutions, tasked to support social work field education.

### Background information

#### **Placement requirements and the liaison person**

The Australian accreditation body for social work education, the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW), requires social work education programs to support field education of

students in social work programs. Social work programs are expected to have a clearly identifiable field education unit, with administrative support, a field education coordinator, and field education liaison persons for each placement (AASW, 2012a). At times, circumstances such as student numbers and distance education can mean that universities contract the liaison role out to experienced social workers or other universities (Alston, 2007). In rural and remote areas liaison persons can travel long distances to visit students during their placement, making the liaison role a costly and resource intensive activity (Alston, 2007). Yet, the AASW expects all staff of a social work program '... to actively contribute to the field education program' (2012a, p. 5) and to incorporate field education learning into the curriculum, reflecting the centrality of field education to the Australian social work program. The AASW prescribes liaison duties; liaison persons are required to maintain regular contact with organisations and students, conduct at least three contacts, including a minimum of one on-site visit, and collaboratively work with students and organisations to develop the placement goals, learning, structure and assessment (AASW, 2012a).

Field education and academics willingness to engage in liaison is impacted by the resourcing of the tertiary education sector in Australia. Field education is marginalised by decreasing university budgets and funding priorities that put pressure on staff to undertake scholarly activity '... rather than spending time on teaching, advising, curriculum development, and field liaison duties' (Lager & Robbins, 2004, p. 7). Field education is a resource intense activity for schools of social work in a climate of budgetary cuts that leave universities dependent on private sector partnerships (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). For academic staff engaged in field education, shrinking resources and increasing student numbers make it difficult to devote time for research and publication (Plath, 2003). Consequently, the research focus of universities and workload issues result in a reluctance of academia to engage in liaison work (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). This is not unique to academic staff in Australia; Wilson and Campbell's (2012) UK based study, for example, outlines social work educators concerns about the extra workload of field education, the lack of recognition of the complex demands of field education and the limitations this places on them to be active researchers. Lyter (2012) highlights that field education directors or coordinators experience lack of resources, power, status, promotion opportunities and seniority. Her research points to discrepancies in salaries, privileges and professional development and limited authority of field education persons in academia (Lyter, 2012). Thus, although the centrality of field education in social work education is recognised across the globe, filling field education roles in academia can marginalise academics in tertiary institutions.

### **The liaison person and off-site supervision**

While the liaison role has been identified as fundamental in supporting student placements (AASW, 2012a), it has not attracted much research attention. The liaison role is generally considered on the side lines of research. Parker's research that explored difficulties in

placement mentioned that students wanted liaison persons to be proactive in making contact and checking progress, and at times take initiative and remove them from unsafe placements (Parker, 2008). In her British study focusing on the work based supervisors of placement students, Henderson (2010) suggested that the liaison person was seen as holding expert powers, and occasionally seen as excluding work-based supervisors and not sharing sufficient information about students' past progress and history (2010). Henderson (2010) found that in placements with off-site supervision the liaison persons mainly communicated with the off-site supervisors, giving less attention to the work-based supervisors. Other research exploring off-site supervision in social work placement, highlighted the importance of triad relationship and communication between the off-site supervisors, work-based supervisor and the student (Abram, Hartung, & Wernet, 2000); this USA based research did not refer to the liaison role or experience.

Alston (2007) recognises that in rural and remote areas liaison persons are often involved in supporting placements with off-site supervision, as fewer social work qualified professionals work in organisations in those communities. Liaison persons in those situations are often involved in professionally supporting isolated workers through training programs, professional supervision, access to resources and professional development activities (Alston, 2007). Henderson (2010) concurs that staff in agencies without social work staff needed extra training and support, and highlights the need to appropriately provide liaison persons with the resources and time to support placements with off-site supervision. Karban (1999) notes that some students in her study into placements with off-site supervision accessed the liaison person as an alternative source of support. Thus, placements with off-site supervision may add extra workload to the liaison role. Overall, what seems to be known in the literature about the liaison person is that they are supporting and contributing to field education, however, their own experiences in and opinions about this role have not been explored in research.

### **Field education in social work: Learning for practice**

Field education is a structured learning experience for social work students undertaken in the field, that is core to their degree. 'It is a cooperative endeavour between the higher education provider, the student, agencies and field educators to assist the integration of theory and practice' (AASW, 2012b, p. 9). This opportunity to engage in practice learning can facilitate students to develop a sense of self-efficacy, necessary for the development of competent practitioners (Parker, 2005). Field education engages students in learning by doing that needs to be carefully planned and supported (Pack, 2011).

Morley and Dunstan (2013, p. 115) highlight that '...the perfect placement is the imperfect learning environment; learning can and does happen anywhere- because student determine their own learning opportunities; critical reflection provides a framework to experience rich, transformative learning regardless of the organisational context in which they are placed'. However, the capacity of social work educators to support practice learning might be

compromised by the erosions of educational infrastructure, thus moving practice learning in the direction of training compliant rather than critical practitioners (Bellinger, 2010a). While social work educators are aiming to prepare students to respond to practice challenges, there are concerns that industry demands for this preparation is focused on meeting target driven agendas rather than ethical practice (Wilson & Campbell, 2012). Thus, a social worker, not attached to the organisational setting could potentially assist students to keep ethical, rights based practice on the learning agenda.

Bellinger argues that while an apprentice style learning model can work well when expert practitioners are promoting expansive learning, it can be problematic when agencies are under pressures (Bellinger, 2010b). Bellinger highlights that students' learning can be undermined by workplace practice that is contrary to the professional aims and values (2010b). Whether the social work is onsite or not thus does not become the defining feature in assessing the quality of a placement, rather the pedagogical culture surrounding the placement (Bellinger, 2010b).

### **Learning in Field Education with Off-site supervision**

The limited literature available about field education with off-site supervision highlights the importance of the triad relationship (Abram, et al., 2000), the support needed for field educators, work-based supervisors and students (Clare, 2001; Henderson, 2010), the need to clarify the responsibilities of the supervisors (Karban, 1999) and the potential for power imbalances between the on-site and off-site supervisors (Henderson, 2010). There are concerns raised about the students' learning in placements supported by an off-site supervisor, for example, about their experiences, learning and assessment and whether the lack of clearly defined social work roles adversely affects the development of social work identity (Plath, 2003). Further questions arise about students' ability to develop critical reflective social work practice with an off-site supervisor who is potentially not connected to the every-day practice context. The danger is that '...any discussion can become merely a theoretical exercise' (Ung, 2002, p. 100).

Moreover, assessment in field education with off-site supervision is complex. The ASSW (2012a) clearly requires that the liaison person utilises consultative processes for assessment, however, the complexity of a four way process of assessment and reporting has been identified as concern about placements with off-site supervision (Plath, 2003). Henderson highlighted that work-based supervisors were rarely involved in the final placement assessment although this was a requirement of the university handbook (Henderson, 2010). Similarly, this author's preliminary findings of interviews with work-based supervisors suggest that they were not always invited to contribute to the assessment of students.

Field education is crucial and central to social work education in a climate where social work education is under pressure. Both the field and social work educators experience pressures

that may make it difficult to support students in their journey to professional social work practice. Thus, there are limited placements with social workers available (Cleak & Smith, 2012) and there are questions about the supervisors' ability to support and guide students in social work placements (McAucliffe & Sudbery, 2005). This paper explores the liaison persons' experience in field education with off-site supervision, as they fulfil the social work education's mandate to support students in their practice learning.

### **Methodology (Zuchowski, 2013)**

The data discussed in this paper specifically considers the experience reported by 11 participants in their role as liaison persons of social work field education with off-site supervision. The interviews with the liaison persons present a subset of data in a larger PhD research with 32 participants regarding their experience as students, field educators, work-based supervisors and/or liaison persons. The data was gathered in qualitative, semi structured interviews with participants who shared their experience as liaison persons.

The aims of the research were to review social work placements with off-site supervision, to explore the experiences and relationships of key players in these placements, to investigate what off-site supervision brings to field education and to develop a model/ framework or principles for field education with off-site supervision. The interviews were conducted in 2011/ 2012 after the study was approved by the University Ethics Committee.

### Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive method of sampling was applied to invite participants with experience in social work student placements with off-site supervision (Creswell, 2007) to participate in this project. The research attracted participants associated with social work programs in Australian universities in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia.

11 participants identified as having supported social work student placements as liaison persons. Nine of the liaison persons were female, two were male. The participants were experienced in the role of liaison person, and most of them had also provided off-site supervision to students at some stage. A number of participants also referred to experiences that linked to a role in field education coordination. In the data analysis, information referring to experiences as supervisors was excluded for this paper. In the process of creating pseudonyms for participants the gender of the participant, their experience, background information and their role remained unaltered.

A recursive approach to interviewing enabled the gathering of rich data. This approach used an interview guide, but followed the lead of the participants in the interview (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). Interview questions covered the participants' experiences of

placements with off-site supervision, the relationships with other key players in the placement, and their vision of the ideal placement.

### Data Analysis

Consideration was given to reoccurring themes within individual interviews and across the collective interviews during data analysis (Minichiello, et al., 2008). The function of memos in NVIVO was used to explore themes and their links. In line with phenomenology data analysis was undertaken with the goal of ‘...reducing the information to significant statements or quotes...’ combining the statements into themes and developing textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

### Limitations

Participants in this study have self-selected into the study and have chosen what they want to share in the interviews, thus reality is explored as the participant presents it, reliant on their recollection and reflection (Minichiello, et al., 2008). Participants’ self-selection may be based on a special interest and awareness of social work field education or off-site supervision. A number of liaison persons have for example commented in the interviews that they have a special interest in field education and suggested that it is an area that is under-researched. The data presented here limits the discussion to the experiences from a liaison person point of view rather than looking at off-site supervision more holistically. There are limitations to just considering these parts of the interview. While participants were asked in the interviews to specifically explore the questions from the liaison point of view during the interview, some may have omitted some information they had already covered when talking about the experience as an off-site supervisor and vice versa.

The small number of participants further means that generalisation about all liaison person experiences cannot be made; however, the rich data from the interviews provides signposts for issues that are useful points of deliberation for social work education.

### Findings

Themes that emerged prominently in the interviews reflected the liaison person’s overall description of their role as bringing the university to the placement. Participants discussed their role, outlined that the ideal placement needed to consider the student learning experience and highlighted that placements with off-site supervision meant more work for them.

#### **Being the university: The role of the liaison person**

The great majority of participants identified that bringing the university perspective to the placement was an important part of the liaison role. Liaison persons saw themselves involved in clarifying roles and briefing persons. They discussed that that they needed to be available and supportive.



Bringing the university perspective to placement was explained in terms of linking the placement in with the university and the degree requirements, ensuring that students have opportunities for learning in placement, checking that everything is in place and that students have a safe learning environment. Wayne, for example, outlined

*I say, when I am doing the liaison officer, listen, you know my job here is 'be the university', the quality control. I am here to make sure the university can be audited by AASW and pass, so I am here actually so someone can come along and look at all the documentation about this placement and say, all of the requirements of the AASW have been met and the student should have passed.'* Wayne

Participants discussed clarifying roles and briefing supervisors and students about their role as part of their role as a liaison person. The liaison role was described by some in terms of a linking role or a central role. Karen, for example, described the liaison role as being the 'anchor' in placements with off-site supervision, explaining that

*I think that it has almost like an anchor role.... just to be that central point so that everybody can be on the same page has been really important so the student is clear and knows that the information that each of the supervisors had it clear and that there is not that uncertainty and difficulty .... it's about having things in place so that the relationship can stay healthy.* Karen

Participants highlighted the importance of providing support for supervisors and students.

*From a liaison person's point of view it is more a role in supporting the supervisor in how to do that role when they are external , what extra resources they could use, ... I suppose coaching along the external supervisor, how to do that better, how I suppose to be more effective, how you feel you have got more connections...* Anna

*I think ... as a liaison person ... you have to be really stringed in, you have to be prepared to be there at those critical times. ... I had pulled the student, and the supervisor [work-based supervisor] turned up at the student's house. She rang me and abused me as well.... Which validated my decision.* Mary

Participants' comments suggest that it is imperative that liaison persons are available and need to be aware of what is happening in placement and prepared to intervene in placement when necessary (Parker, 2008). This is an important role, as research shows that students are potentially at risk of harassment and bullying in field education (Gair & Thomas, 2008). The discussion of the role of the liaison person by liaison persons indicates the importance of their active involvement in field education. Liaison assist supervisors, students and processes to ensure university and professional expectations are met and that students have a safe learning experience or are pulled out of an unsafe experience.

Participants' reflections highlight the significance of liaison persons having a presence in the field education experience.

## Field education coordination considerations

Bringing the university perspective to the placement extended for many of the participants to include considerations that fit the field education coordination role, a role that had initially not been identified as a key stakeholder in researched discussed here. Schools of social work need to allocate both field education coordinators and liaison persons to each placement (AASW, 2012a). Next to placement liaison, responsibilities of field education coordinators include placement development, engagement of training of field educators and field education integration workshops (AASW, 2012a). Interestingly, field education coordination considerations did also emerge in the discussion of participants who did not hold this role as an official position, thus liaison persons shared concerns beyond considering the support of individual placements, reflecting a responsibility for the whole field education program.

Participants raised issues regarding the need to organise liaison persons, recruit off-site supervisors, the quality of off-site supervisors, facilitating good learning opportunities and the difficulties of finding placements. A number of participants, for instance, worried about the quality and preparation of off-site supervisors and liaison persons. Mary for example reflected,

*I worry about us contracting out liaison so much. Because I don't know that we sit a liaison person down and really, I don't know what briefing they get .... they just get a contract and just go and do some liaisons. Whether we really talk them through all the nuances of... what we are trying to achieve for students. I don't know that we do liaison training.* Mary

Iona shared her concerns about processes for hiring off-site supervisors,

*We have essentially... kind of opened the flood gates to a number of social workers and then allocated [them] to students and don't know anything about their work, really. I don't think that is really good process, we are not looking after the students as well as well we should be.* Iona

A number of liaison persons shared that it can be difficult to find liaison persons, off-site supervisors and placements. Some of this impacted on the work they would do to support the student and the placement. Mary provided the following example,

*The pragmatism of regional , the process of finding placement and ...the quality of the people we have to use sometimes....we aren't necessary able to be picky, and therefore the importance of liaison to help student unravel what sometimes is quite appalling practice, without turning against the person. The supervisor is a bad supervisor, personally, no, your supervisor is in a very difficult situation.* Mary

## The ideal placement: Modes of supervision are just part of the picture

Participants were asked to consider what they thought might be an ideal placement and a range of reflections resulted. There was some discussion about whether internal or off-site supervision in placement was ideal. Four of the participants suggested that on-site supervision might be preferable, however three of them then qualified this by commenting that off-site supervision can work well, and two highlighted that off-site supervision was a form of preparation for current day social work practice, thus Wayne suggested

*Internal is much better, but increasingly...social workers work in positions and roles that aren't designated social workers...so the reality is that people will work in all of those agencies and preparing them for that work isn't a bad thing. Wayne*

Other participants pointed out that there was no such thing as ideal, and the great majority of participants emphasised that the placement opportunities needed to be centred on learning opportunities and the student. Mary and Dana, for example pointed out

*...having to try to find the best outcome for a student in a situation in terms of their learning. Mary*

*...the placement where everybody was aware as what they were going to contribute, everyone was committed to doing the best that they could, everyone was flexible to move with what was going on....and ... put the student learning first of all. Dana*

Participants outlined that if field education included off-site supervision it was particularly important to clarify roles, and ensure that the supervisor was available and joint meetings took place. Some participants worried about assessment as supervisors did not seem to talk to each other. Other participants identified that it was sometimes harder for students to access professional leadership, and that it was difficult to get everyone involved or supervisors committed.

Dana, for instance, proposed that placements with off-site supervision needed quality input from supervisors:

*The off-site supervisor is able to be available and supportive and ready to give the time entirely to the student when he meets with her for this hour each week and ...that he sorts, so that everyone is organised, everyone is on time, everyone is aware of what is to be achieved, flexible within that, so knowing the, knowing the framework well, but having flexibility for any, misadventures that happen along the way. Dana*

Iona highlighted the positive outcomes of clarification of roles and expectations:

*I think it works well when everyone knows what their expectations are. There is a lot of work involved in having a student, you know, just in terms of liaison meetings, the assessment tasks that have to be done. And it works well when people are prepared to put in the time to do that. Iona*

Yet, a number of participants identified the impact of time constraints, and suggested that getting people together for meetings or even getting off-site supervisors to provide all the required supervision hours can be challenging and resource intensive. Iona, for example explained:

*I think there is a real issue about people considering that role ... as a job and a professional role. And I think there is a number of external supervisors that don't. That kind of do it in addition to their bits and pieces and don't see the students enough, and that's an issue, and I think... that suits the university sometimes, because if everybody saw them all the time you are supposed to it would cost a bomb. Iona*

### **Supporting placements with off-site supervision: Potentially satisfying, but more work**

Some participants identified that their involvement in placements with off-site supervision could be satisfying, however, the great majority of participants noted that providing liaison support in placement with off-site supervision meant more work for them. The extra work included building links and holding things together, providing role clarification, managing relationships, providing extra support to students and off-site supervisors and getting examples about placement learning.

Bridget summarised the extra work load in the following way:

*I think what I am saying is as well, I know what I am saying is that there is lot more work involved with a student on placement where you do have an external supervisor, because of all those links that need to be made. Bridget*

Similarly, Robert identified extra work in making connections and organising meetings

*...because you are chasing your tail to get things signed and then, trying to organise meeting and then. And the field educator wouldn't come to liaison meetings, because they are too busy in meetings, because they were the manager. Robert*

Liaison persons identified extra work resulting from managing triad relationships and trying to get clear example for assessment. Mary, for example, considered her involvement in managing the triad relationship

*As a liaison person that is quite a difficult relationship to manage when you have got the three people and they are not necessarily comfortable in their roles. Mary*

And Bridget shared the following reflection:

*I have been thinking, next time I have a placement where there is the external supervisor, I have to work harder in eliciting information about, um, getting some clear examples, that link placement experiences with learning. Bridget*

Nine out of the eleven participants discussed their work to support placements with off-site supervision in ways that showed extra engagement from them. Many participants described various points multiple times, indicating that for liaison persons placements with off-site supervision can present an extra workload, in a context where field education is already restricting their ability to meet the expectations of tertiary institutions to deliver research outputs and attract income (Morley & Dunstan, 2013).

### Discussion

The findings outlined complex tasks and roles of the liaison person in supporting the field education experiences in social work. Participants discussed that they were bringing the university perspective to the placement and recognised the significance of their role to the placement experience and their responsibility of ensuring that students and supervisors are prepared and supported for the practice learning opportunity. It also emerged that the context of this work was underscored by tensions that might be indicative of current neo-liberal pressures impacting social workers in the field and social work educators (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Participants were concerned about contracting out liaison and hiring off-site supervisors in large numbers, and questioned the quality of the persons hired as the 'flood-gates' were opened and people might be hired who fulfil the role on top of 'other bits and pieces'. Liaison persons were concerned about the preparation, supports and engagement that was possible with off-site supervisors and liaison persons. Placement with off-site supervision have the potential to value –add in learning environments where social work input is lacking, where relevant supports are not available or in emerging fields of practice (Zuchowski, 2011). It might be a useful outside source of support in agencies that are under pressure, where workplace practices are not in accordance with social work's aims and values, resulting in restrictive learning (Bellinger, 2010b). Students participants in the larger study highlighted the off-site supervision can add a new layer of learning to the placement experience (Zuchowski, 2013). Supervisors located away from everyday pressures in an organisation, might be able to devote time to prepare students to respond to practice challenges focused on ethical practice, rather than industry that might focus on meeting target driven agendas (Wilson & Campbell, 2012). However, as the pedagogical quality becomes central to what we consider a suitable practice learning opportunities (Bellinger, 2010b), we need to be concerned if the quality of the persons we are hiring to value add and support placements is not assured. The concerns might be reflected in the lower satisfaction of students in placements with off-site supervision (Cleak & Smith, 2012). Cleak and Smith (2012, p. 256) caution about increasing the placement pool through field education with off-site supervision as it was costly and '...may not provide students with the most effective learning about the profession and practice of social work'. Therefore, a model of field education that uses off-site supervision with the sole purpose of responding to lack of placements with on-site supervision due to growing student numbers and the unavailability of social workers in busy and stretched human service and welfare organisations may not be the best way of creating pedagogic quality in field education. This

leaves field education units scrambling to find supervisors and liaison persons, and concerns social work educators as highlighted in this research's findings.

Participants highlighted that the ideal placement is not so much about the provision of on-site or off-site supervision, rather around the learning opportunities and supports for students. They outlined that ensuring that the learning occurred and students were supported in their endeavours resulted in extra workload for them in placements with off-site supervision. Liaison role requirements are around supporting the field education student in their learning and collaborating with supervisors and the agency to develop the placement goals, learning, structure and assessment (AASW, 2012a), however participants' discussions indicate that liaison persons take much wider responsibility for the field education program, at least in placements with off-site supervision. Participants discussed the extra work in making the links between people, getting everyone together, managing the triad relationship, receiving assessment input from supervisors and providing the extra support to students as well as supervisors. Some indicated that they trained and supported the off-site supervisor, reflecting Henderson's (2010) finding that agencies and persons without social workers on site needed more support and training to provide field education opportunities for social work students. The good news in this is that liaison persons engaged in this research worked hard to ensure field education meets requirements, the concerning issue is that this time-consuming work would make it difficult for them to strive in academia.

### Conclusion

The findings from this study provide an insight into important aspects of the role and function of liaison persons and their experiences in supporting placements with off-site supervision. The extra work load for liaison persons in supporting placements with off-site supervision is of concern considering that field education is already marginalised in academia (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Placement with off-site supervision might be seen as less than ideal because of extra workloads and concerns about the quality of the people hired to do the job.

Yet, the possibility exists that they could value-add, offer extra layers of learning, in times when organisations are under pressure and may offer restrictive learning opportunities. More research into this area is needed, particularly with a focus on developing a model that focuses on establishing quality pedagogic learning environments for field education with off-site supervision. While this form of practice learning for social work is utilised in social work education, it needs to be guided by best practice principles in this area to meet AASW (2012a) requirements and ensure the emergence of competent social work practitioners (Parker, 2005). I would argue strongly, that emerging field education models need to be more than responses to difficult times, they need to be planned appropriately, with student learning and growth at their centre and be supported well in a collaboration between the university, the field and the student.

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