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Social work e-placements during Covid-19: Learnings of staff and students

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Abstract

This paper describes and explores e-placements that engaged social work students in semester 1 of 2020 due to placement disruption after the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded. The term e-placement describes a placement undertaken off-site from the placement organisation or agency. Students at James Cook University [JCU], Queensland, Australia, who could not continue in onsite placements were offered the opportunity to participate in a Community Connector Project [CCP] to complete their placement. The aims of the project were to provide an online supported placement experience in order to deliver a comprehensive and interactive learning experience for students to meet the learning outcomes of a field education experience, work with the community to explore community needs during the pandemic, share and distribute existing information and resources, and/- or develop further information and resources.

Twenty students chose to participate in the CCP. The project included bi-weekly meetings, small group and individual work. This paper was written collaboratively between field education staff, students and a service provider. It presents practice reflections on the project, its outcomes, challenges and learning. Implications for education practice are drawn.

Implication Statement

- Students in e-placements can feel overwhelmed and isolated and need targeted support and rich opportunities for collaboration and exchange;
- E-placements can be valuable learning opportunities;

- E-placements are resource intensive if student learning and safety are to be prioritised.

Keywords

Field education; students; field education staff; partnership; Covid-19; remote placements; e-placements; community; simulated learning.

Background

Social work students undertake 1000 hours of supervised fieldwork during their degree, and generally at least one of the placements is in direct practice (AASW, 2020a). Undertaking a placement in the field allows students to integrate their theoretical learning into practice (Cleak & Wilson, 2019). In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded and at JCU the 43 enrolled (n=6 final placement; n=37 first placement) Bachelor students were not able to continue onsite placement. Of these students, 16 (n=6 final placement students; n=10 first placement students) continued placement within the same organisation in an online capacity, either involved in service delivery or project work. Of the remaining students (n=27), 20 continued placement with the field education team in the CCP. Students were physically located in Brisbane, Mackay, Townsville, and Cairns region, engaging in the CCP via online technologies. Implementing the CCP was an attempt to allow students to progress in their degree, have a valuable learning experience and prepare students for changes to practice, education and research that were likely to follow the Covid-19 outbreak (Miller, 2020). It recognised calls to rethink the way field education is delivered in social work education generally. This is timely, as it is difficult to find sufficient placements in Australia and elsewhere (Bellinger, 2010; Morris, Dragone, Peabody, & Carr, 2020; Regehr, 2013; Zuchowski, Cleak, Nickson & Spencer, 2019). It is not the first time that e-placements or remote placements were trialled (Crisp & Hosken, 2016), however, for the education

providers and the students, this was a sudden development and the implication of this will be discussed further.

The AASW recognised the impact of the pandemic on social work education and on the 1st of May 2020, the accreditation criteria were urgently reviewed and relaxed by the AASW in response to a request from the Heads of the Australian Schools of Social Work. Changes included the recognition of non-traditional placements, reduction of placement hours, application of group supervision and undertaking placement work remotely (AASW, 2020c). In allowing changes to the Accreditation standards in 2020, the AASW (2020) recognised that student learning, wellbeing and financial wellbeing needed to be considered in the decision making regarding education in the context of Covid-19. Similarly, social work field education accreditation standards were relaxed and hours reduced elsewhere; for example, in Canada and the United States (CASWE, 2020; CSWE, 2020).

In response to onsite placements being ceased at JCU, the social work field education team designed a project plan to run the CCP based on Asset Based Community Development principles (Nurture Development, 2020) and submitted this for approval to the College and then the AASW before inviting students to submit an EOI to be part of the project. Students were appointed new social work supervisors from the social work academic team as well as the project leader as a task supervisor for their placement. Each student was required to amend their learning plan, develop new learning goals, methods, tasks and reflections to consider how they could achieve the required learning in field education and develop practice competence in accordance with the AASW Practice Standards (AASW, 2020a). Refocusing the learning plan to the CCP aimed to help students identify the potential of the learning experience, recognise the professional tasks and opportunities to practice in the new setting and the usefulness of those to develop their professional practice (Bogo, 2015). In order for field education to prepare students for professional practice, learning has to be pedagogically

scaffolded (Bellinger, 2010). Constructive feedback, critical reflection on practice, observing practice and the supervisory relationship are valuable for promoting practice competence and professional identity (Roulston, Cleak and Vreugdenhil (2018). Thus in the CCP, the educational tools, students' engagement in identifying learning and opportunities, and the focus on supervision and bi-weekly meetings was about establishing the important connection between theory and placement learning and the relationships between all parties involved (Bellinger, 2010).

The CCP was aimed at producing a quality alternative placement learning experience, reflecting the unprecedented situation that social work students faced as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. The AASW (2020b) pointed to the unique position social workers faced and referred to the need for the dissemination of accurate information and interventions designed to address the increasing level of anxiety and fear arising from the pandemic. The objectives in the CCP were to link expert advice and local knowledge to connect information and services to people in their community. The project would enable students to develop community development skills, to collate and deliver accurate information throughout communities using various technologies and e-platforms (Nurture Development, 2020).

A project plan was developed with the following aims: to facilitate a comprehensive and interactive field education learning experience; provide continuity and reduce interruptions to students' learning; develop students' understanding of social workers as essential responders in disaster management; produce a documented resource for use by educators, supervisors and students; provide a source of accurate, timely and relevant information for community members and showcase social work in times of crisis. At the beginning of the CCP students were allocated into groups to develop two resources: Learning in an online environment and a guide for online supervision for students and supervisors.

The aims of this group work were to get students familiar with each other and working independently yet towards a common goal and to develop field education resources using their own skills and assets (Nurture Development, 2020). It was an opportunity for self-directed learning, facilitating meaning-making and taking control of learning (Leach, 2000).

Next, students explored community needs they could address through the CCP. Consequently they formed groups to work on these topic areas: Raising Hope-Covid-19-Youth and children; Domestic Violence Warriors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations/communities; Social Enterprise; Disability; E-Wisdom and Community Connector Evaluation. One student collated the information from the students involved and distributed a newsletter shared with students, liaison people and supervisors. Additionally to their individual and group work, students participated in bi-weekly 90 minute zoom meetings facilitated by students and supported by two field education staff members.

Whilst research placements are part of what is possible in field education and recognised as beneficial for professional practice and the potential uptake of evidence to inform practice (Rubin, Robinson & Valutis, 2010; Zuchowski & Gair, 2020; Zuchowski, Heyeres & Tsey, 2019), a large cohort of students undertaking a research project is unusual. Moreover, the majority of students had prepared for and commenced an onsite placement but were then required to change to placement in an online setting at short notice. Although resilience and adaptability are a strength in any professional setting (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009), the complete removal of the face-to-face component in field education was more than unexpected. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic many students in Australia and elsewhere were displaced from their placement (Morris et al., 2020). Onsite student placement is highly regarded by students and a focal point in the social work program, contributing to students' confidence and the integration of theory to practice (Cleak &

Wilson, 2019; Davies et al., 2010). While e-placements have been trialled elsewhere as community development focused placements, students in those placements would have been prepared to undertake these (Crisp & Hosken, 2016). Here, the change of placement mode, focus and location were unexpected. Cleak and Wilson (2019) highlighted that students have feelings of loss at the completion of a normal period of placement, thus it is likely that a sudden and unexpected end to the onsite placement may have incurred those emotions, which then had to be set aside to refocus on an e-placement.

This reflection explores the CCP placements and student and staff involvement and learning. We are hopeful that it will help educators to "...future-proofing courses in times of uncertainty and change" (Mercer & Kytherotis, 2021).

Methodology

This article has been written collaboratively by field education staff, an external service provider and two students involved in the CCP as a collaborative inquiry, where all involved are co-researchers and co-subjects, founded on a philosophy and process of inclusivity (Bellinger & Elliott, 2011; Heron & Reason, 2008). As a form of action research it aimed to involve students and service providers as partners in the inquiry (Heron & Reason, 2008). It is a joint practice reflection on being involved in running, implementing and participating in the CCP that was created in response to placement changes due to Covid-19 in 2020. Each author contributed to the development of ideas and content and thus had possibility to shape the direction (Heron & Reason, 2008). The collaborative inquiry and co-authorship was aimed at developing a partnership approach in order to reflect on the CCP (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

This joint work occurred after the final result of the placement subject was released, however, it needs to be acknowledged that while a 'co-operative inquiry process can be very

liberating' (Heron & Reason, 2008, p.374), there are still power differentials in the various positions of the authors (Bellinger & Reason, 2011). The authors encouraged each other to share honestly and with integrity, and while we have not used other students' comments in this paper, contributions of the students involved echo student feedback from anonymous sources. The process of working together involved joint meetings, individual reflections, discussions and exploration on how we could share our expertise in safe ways. Data collection and analysis broadly involved a cyclic reflection involving formulating the focus, developing key ideas, discussion of and reflection on the focus, immersion into the topic, agreement and action, and reflection and refinement (Herron & Reason, 2008). The discussions included exploring principles of working as partners and acknowledging the expertise that each co-author could bring to the table. Partnership here was seen as a process of actively engaging all co-authors with the aim of working and learning together, in order to avoid reinforcing power inequalities or feelings of vulnerability (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017).

When we discussed this methodology section, students shared that some of the feedback of the wider student group would have been limited, because not everyone felt they could share things on the JCU online learning platform 'learnjcu' that they had shared personally with each other earlier. This might also have been a factor in other students not wanting to participate in the joint reflection and writing of this article. While co-authors shared that they were comfortable in the process, and contributions were transparent and open, all relationships have aspects of power and that may result in limitations of what people share. Thus, we acknowledge that our reflection will be only part of the story.

Practice Reflections

In our reflections, we considered the facilitation of the project and explored what students achieved in their project, the facilitation of the project, student learning and professional growth, how the work was received and how students responded to being in the CCP. The thread of the exploration is the learning in field education, and the indicators on whether and how it was achieved.

What students achieved in the project

The Raising Hope- Covid-19 –Youth and children group aimed at creating a network and website. They collated tips and resources on how to manage time and identify available services for children, young people and their parents during the pandemic. The group created a website and showcased this to the wider student cohort at the end of placement (<https://raisinghopenetwork.wixsite.com/raisinghopenetwork>).

The Domestic Warrior Group worked collaboratively to develop a 70-page practice guide for practicing health professionals and future students in Queensland, covering a range of domestic violence related topics, including exploring how Covid-19 impacted gendered violence and ways of responding to domestic violence. Their work was undertaken in partnership with a clinical educator from Queensland Health.

The Kinship Connect student group analysed research and available information relevant during Covid-19 to Indigenous communities. Students liaised with a Cairns based community organisation working in remote communities and service providers in Yarrabah to progress their project. They developed a website covering relevant information for people living in Indigenous communities including human service organisation contact numbers, Covid-19 facts, and health and safety strategies.

Two students joined an existing research project on Social Enterprise organisations in the North Queensland region led by a JCU social work staff member. They presented their findings to the CCP group, including examples of Social Enterprise organisations within the region and gaps that emerged through the research.

One student collated accessible and user-friendly information for community members with a disability and their carers. The student's project resulted in a handbook for families and individuals with disabilities, including information about human service organisations, changes to services such as food deliveries, and ideas for keeping busy and engaged while staying at home.

The E-wisdom group ran three evaluation processes with the students involved in the CCP, including two surveys and focus group discussions about students' involvement in the CCP. The information sought, collated, analysed and presented by students was used to progress and improve the project.

The facilitation of the project

The placement setup required the mirroring of on-site placement engagement and learning strategies and activities into a virtual and online environment. This was a shared learning journey for students and field education staff who supported the CCP. The project was facilitated taking a position of "all teach, all learn" as an approach to strengthen research capacity and project management (McPhail et al., 2018). It was an opportunity for real world teaching and meaningful assessment through students being co-producers of the CCP (Mercer & Kytherotis, 2021). This presented a challenge to students' understanding of learning where the idea is that a predefined end goal or objective has been articulated and the knowledge and skills transfer for achieving this goal is one-directional from the educator to the learner, which is reflected in the traditional view of field education where a one-on-one supervision

model guides the student learning (Cleak & Wilson, 2018). Students were challenged by distinguishing the situation as new, unique and an opportunity for being part of creating something novel, rather than being 'served' by a tried out concept. Engaging with new ways of learning and acting fits the idea of field education being an opportunity to learn about oneself, how one generates knowledge and uses this as a human service practitioner (Cleak & Wilson, 2018). The concept of how material is taught, experienced and facilitated needed to be taken apart, including a critical group reflection led by students on social work learning in an e-placement and how this is transferable to other practice contexts. Critical reflection on the placement experience and actions is important for students to understand what they are learning, influences actions and to have a sense of agency and possibility (Theobald, Gardner, & Long, 2017).

Crisp and Hosken (2016) outlined that remote placements were not suitable to all students. They suggested that students need to be self-directed, able to manage technical issues in an online environment and able to overcome feelings of isolation that might occur despite being connected with peers and supervisors. In facilitating remote placements, issues such as the physical and psychological safety of students, the quality of the learning experience, the establishment of individual learning plans, online learning strategies and supervision have to be considered carefully (Crisp & Hosken, 2016).

The field education staff held different role responsibilities such as field education supervisors, task supervisors and educators, which added another level of complexity. Juggling these different roles and demands required additional time commitment from the staff going beyond the scope of a traditional placement stakeholder role usually held by academic staff. However, this additional time commitment was essential to facilitate a pedagogically valuable placement learning environment to the students. The bi-weekly sessions with the student group were important for check-ins, project updates, critical

reflection, learning and support. The focus was on creating a student-led learning and placement environment that allowed for mutual teaching and learning (McPhail et al., 2018; Ornstein & Moses, 2010). Similar to what would have happened in an on-site learning environment, staff modelled what was expected, built a clear framework for sessions, but then handed over the planning and facilitation of each session to students. This enabled students to develop skills and knowledge in group work with a focus on developing online group work skills and team working skills in community development through research, networking with agencies and community asset mapping. Students further developed a range of interpersonal communication skills, project management skills and online technical skills. Although students gained and developed specific knowledge and skills from the perspective of the field educators/task supervisors, these learning opportunities and achievements were not immediately visible to and acknowledged by every student. Thus, deep learning needed to be made visible through discussions and critical reflection (Theobald, et al., 2017).

Student learning and professional growth

The field education staff observed the importance of helping students become aware of the learning they were engaged in through critical reflection, because the sense that this was not a real placement experience kept emerging. Author 1 reflects

It was interesting to hear the students talk about 'when they were on' placement, referring to the first part of the placement that was cancelled. For a long time it was like this was where the real learning took place. It was important to explore with students what they were learning about team work, interpersonal communication, research, networking, social work theory, fields of practice, community work and other modes of practice for students to feel confident to articulate their social work learning.

Collaborative work and joint exploration proved useful, not only to ensure that good processes and support were in place, but also to facilitate peer-learning and insights. Students sharing insights about learning and growth was an important experience that allowed students to identify new learning that they had not previously considered, but also have a sense of confidence in the learning and growth they were undertaking.

In recognising non-traditional placements during the pandemic, the AASW was clear that adequate social work supervision needed to be provided and that students needed to meet individual learning outcomes (AASW, 2020c). Each student had a range of opportunities to explore their social work learning, through establishing and reviewing individual learning plans with their supervisors and liaison people, a combination of individual and group supervision, participation in peer groups on project work, participation in integration groups and project meetings every week. The project meetings were targeted around the project process, the learning opportunities of each stage and the issues that students raised. Both students and supervisors facilitated the process and content of these sessions included asset-based community development, self-care strategies, transferrable skills for the workforce and current global events such as Black Lives Matter.

In collaboratively writing this paper, participating students identified that the placement helped strengthen their social work skills and assisted the community during the Covid-19 crisis. Author 6 comments:

I researched topics relevant to many spheres of social work, like community and project development. I also learned the basics of analysing data and presenting it in written form, especially when we evaluated CCP members' attitudes and experiences during placement. This project helped me to see how social work practice can fill gaps in society. It also sparked an interest in me about the various levels of social

work and how social workers can drive social change at individual, community, and national levels.

Author two identifies how this placement connected with theoretical learning in other subjects and helped her professional growth:

This e-placement taught me the value of communication skills in a virtual setting. I had previously done a subject which touched on remote counselling, via phone or video, but reality is very different to a scenario setting. It is obviously more difficult to read body language and pick up on cues through this medium and the importance of listening and comprehension is paramount. Also important to me, was making my colleagues feel comfortable and I found myself striving to always be open, approachable, friendly and encouraging during the sessions. I believe this worked for me because I made many connections outside of the main group where I was able to give and receive additional support around the e-placement experience.

The impact of placement on further study and practice was also emphasised by author 6:

I became more conscious about the importance of theory and professional values in social work practice by participating in the e-placement and this has transferred to how I present ideas in other subjects. Placement helped me to unpack key theories in community work such as ABCD and grass roots approaches because field education staff focussed on these and always linked placement activities to theories. I was able to write assignments by incorporating theories and the AASW Code of Ethics more intentionally because I have firsthand experience of discussing theories and working with these in placement.

I was able to talk about theories and values for the first time with other social workers and this gave me confidence to explore and express my ideas of social work practice. This has reflected in my other university subjects and assignments.

The work of the students had a positive impact and outcomes for the community. Author five comments on and acknowledges the work that the students had undertaken, guided and supported by her input, but largely independently:

For me the standout achievements of the document were the evaluation of the risk assessment tools; I think this will provide our department with a great basis to evaluate the use of standardised risk assessment tools within the Townsville University Hospital. I also very much valued the gendered approach to understanding and responding to domestic and family violence. The group successfully articulated this throughout the document.

Elsewhere, Morris et al. (2020) stressed the importance of a field education approach that values and supports student-initiated field education projects responsive to rapidly developing social needs. They highlighted that this fits social work's emphasis on social justice and empowerment.

Being in the project

Students made a choice about being involved in the CCP, however, for those involved, the project was the only option left to complete their placement that semester. Students expressed that they entered the project with uncertainty, particularly around being unsure what it would be like to work on an original project that would require them to complete field education at home. Author 6 outlines:

There were feelings of apprehension at the outset of the project. However, these feelings subsided once we received direction from Queensland Health about the practice guide and what it would entail.

I had been looking forward to a face-to-face placement, so the first few weeks of CCP were demanding because I had to get used to the routine of working in my home office space for 35 hours a week.

Field education staff recognised that for many students being involved in a project or research placement would not have been a choice and that some experienced grief in light of the loss of their onsite placement. Students would have considered their personal circumstances and the continuation of their degree, so in some way their choice might not have been free as such. Staff also noticed that students recognised that the sudden change was due to Covid-19 and that the project allowed them to continue with placement. Author 1 observes:

I think there might have been some leeway given to the social work staff in Study Period 1 due to the fact that Covid-19 caused interruptions everywhere. Students accepted the sudden change and put effort in to make this project work

Author 3 highlights

Covid-19 pushed us to trial this type of placement. It helped us to conceptualise a project that we would probably not have envisioned otherwise. Would we do it again? In considering our responsibility toward the students I would say yes, and the outcomes were fantastic, but it took a lot of extra work, was resource intensive. And thus any such project needs to be resourced appropriately and students need to have a real choice. This can't be the only option to complete placement.

Being involved in the evaluation of the project highlighted a number of issues that students were struggling with. Author two reflects:

I was lucky enough to be asked to design the questionnaire that went to the students to evaluate how they were feeling about the change to an online placement setting. In order to do this, I had to critically reflect on how I was feeling about it myself. I also liaised with some of the students in the group who I had already developed a relationship with, and asked them their feelings. They talked about grief at the loss of physical placements, feelings of isolation, motivation issues, the distractions surrounding working at home with children and other family members being present, and the fact that it felt like just more uni work, sitting behind a computer all day, reading and researching. These ideas formed the basis for the questionnaire.

Author two further considers the benefits of undertaking this project as part of a group, such as being connected with others:

The benefits that came out of carrying out the evaluation, especially for me, was that we were all experiencing similar feelings, similar fears and asking similar questions about where this was all leading. It brought this student cohort together, in a virtual space, where the understanding, empathy, compassion and support for one another created a cohesive, functioning family that I personally found very rewarding to be a part of.

This highlights the value of student-led group support and suggests that it can alleviate stresses experienced in field education as highlighted elsewhere (Humphrey, 2013).

Implications for practice and education

This CCP was implemented because of the sudden end to onsite placement in Study Period 1 2020, however, there are insights to be drawn for Social Work field education

generally. Across the globe it is difficult to source sufficient quality placement opportunities for social work students (Morris et al., 2020; Zuchowski et al., 2019). Moreover, times of uncertainty and change necessitate contingency planning and future proofing the course. It is important to explore the sustainability of field education and the opportunities for quality alternative placement models (Bellinger, 2010; Neden, Townsend & Zuchowski, 2018; Zuchowski et al., 2019). As highlighted by Morris et al., the pandemic offered opportunities to consider the delivery of field education and explore "... alternative educational models responsive to the needs emerging in the community" (2020, p 4-5). Collaborative education research involves students in education and developing tools that can make a difference in society (Mercer & Kytherotis, 2021), and thus prepare them for professional practice through their critical engagement in and reflection about placement (Bellinger, 2010). This learning has to be carefully planned and supported.

Various authors have called for a fundamental rethink of what field education involves (see for example, Bellinger, 2010; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Crisp & Hosken, 2016). Crisp and Hosken (2016) suggested that while the traditional approach has been for students to acquire field education learning outside the university, other opportunities such as participation in action learning projects under the guidance of an education provider can create opportunities for collaborative learning with peers and communities about key tenets of practicing social work and facilitating the growth of self-directed practitioners (Crisp & Hosken, 2016). Crisp and Hosken (2016) highlighted that the key is not the location of the placement, but the critical opportunities to learn about social work practice with an emphasis on social change as a core activity in order to develop social work graduates with the commitment, confidence and skills for social change. The reflections about student learning and project outcomes suggest that learning about being involved in social change and developing these skills took place in this e-placement model. What has been critically highlighted, though, is that student

learning, confidence and awareness of what online work can offer in practice needs to be extrapolated and exemplified in supervision and project meetings. Critical feedback, observation of practice and linking theory with practice in supervision are crucial to quality learning in field education (Bogo, 2015). Factors enabling students to be self-directed in their learning included the resources and guidance available to them, their confidence and existing knowledge, their motivation and the time for learning (Leach, 2000). While placement learning in onsite field education seems to happen through the daily interactions, participation and engagement, these things do not happen for students in the same way when they work on projects, even collaboratively, physically removed from organisations and others. This provides opportunities and challenges for tertiary education. On one hand students must draw more on their own resources, knowledge base, peers and colleagues to define and respond to emerging issues and in the process can develop their social work identity (Bellinger, 2010). On the other hand, this requires universities to be centrally engaged in practice learning environments, 'providing a clear support structure in which academic staff and people in the community are fully engaged in the service creation, ensures that students are able to hold the dynamic connection between classroom and practice learning' (Bellinger, 2010, p.2461).

Whilst all students had access to consistent task and professional supervision, each student had a unique experience with learning and supervision; this is consistent with concepts of self-directed learning. Learning is a process that engages the individual, no one can do this for someone else and each student's context brings its own complexity (Leach, 2000). Learning is an internal process and each student is involved in meaning making and drawing insights for themselves. The role for educators is to guide and offer support, balancing instruction and opportunities for exploration (Leach, 2000), framed in the relationships of the parties involved (Bellinger, 2010). The CCP offered students a wide scope to work in, facilitating creativity and the time and context to explore, research and

critically reflect on practice. Thus, implications of educational practice are to include tools for critical reflection, regular group meeting times, opportunities for students to lead explorations, discussions and reflections, and supervision focused on exploring the professional learning through alternative learning contexts. Useful structures for this reflection could be Bogo's (2015) or Roulston et al.'s (2018) explorations of learning activities to develop professional practice in field education.

It would be important to ensure that e-placements include a focus on supporting students' emotional and physical wellbeing and safety. Multiple issues such as family responsibilities, work commitments and finances make students' general experience in field education difficult (Gair & Baglow, 2018). Undertaking the placement remotely from a host organisation can further stress students (Crisp & Hosken, 2016). Thus strategies for student support would have to be intentional and targeted. The use of student-led group support during field education would be a valuable strategy, but not all student peer-support and exploration leads to positive discussions in the group. If a student experiences the placement negatively, they may tend to share this negativity. Whilst shared experiences can be supportive when mutual, the negativity may gaslight the experience of fellow students who are enjoying their experience. Thus in order to facilitate processes and to mediate experiences, student peer-support needs to be structured, planned and supported (Humphrey, 2013).

Further research should explore whether participation in research during placement can increase research confidence, uptake of evidence in practice and willingness and interest to engage in research (Zuchowski & Gair, 2020) when this research or project placement has not been by choice. Previous research has highlighted that not all students might be suitable for research placements and not all students are suitable to be on remote placements (Crisp &

Hosken, 2016). It would be useful to know how being on a project/research e-placement impacts students' willingness and interest to be engaged in and use research for practice.

Conclusion

The CCP was a quickly conceptualised field education project that allowed students to complete their placement, undertake relevant field education, engage in community development work that responded to community needs at the time of Covid-19 and thus model social work practice to students and the community. It was implemented because of limitations to onsite placements due to Covid-19 restrictions, and our reflections highlighted that students were appreciative of the fact that the field education unit put this in place in time of a crisis and responded to their needs. Yet, while they identified professional learning and growth, the sudden nature of implementing an online group-based project placement was still unsettling and not fully satisfying to everyone.

Student-led group support, supervision, guidance and guided learning was useful, however, students in e-placements can feel overwhelmed and isolated. This highlights the need for targeted support and rich opportunities for collaboration and exchange and to make the opportunities for learning explicit through collaborative critical reflection. E-placements can be valuable learning opportunities, and these opportunities need to be guided through instruction, frameworks and opportunities for critical reflection and exploration. It was our experience that the support of e-placements was resource intensive in order to prioritise student learning and safety.

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