"I Would Have Done a Degree in Events Management if I Wanted to do This Stuff": Social work student learning through community events

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ABSTRACT

Debates in social work practice and education in relation to community development have plagued the profession for the past five decades. As educators and social work practitioners over the years we have heard a common complaint from students about community-based placements particularly those that involve organising community events. These complaints suggest that the learning possible in organising community events is not relevant or useful for skills development or future social work practice. This article seeks to identify and reclaim the usefulness of organising community events within a community development context for social work student learning. The paper draws on practice reflections and reported student learning through the Glebe Community Development Project's work with social housing communities in Inner Sydney, Australia. The article matches the learning opportunities created through community events with the AASW Practice Standards 2013. It is intended to influence academics, field placement supervisors and students to revalue community-based placements as a site for learning

Keywords: *Community development; Social work; Student learning; Community events*

This article aims to contribute to teaching and learning in social work and welfare practice. It draws on the experience of the authors as educators and field supervisors in the provision of what is variously labelled 'non-direct', 'unstructured' or 'macro' field education in urban Sydney. Combined, the authors have been directly involved in practice learning for over 30 students over the past five years. In sharing our experiences, we have become aware of the negative view held by some students towards community-based placements and the challenges many students experience in linking the learning from these placements to social work professional practice. This challenge of course is not new, with tensions between 'social work' and 'community work' being a common thread in the profession's history (Hugman, 2016; Thorpe & Petruchina, 1992). Contemporary challenges in social work education (students as consumers; credentialism; neo-liberal workplaces; and constrained higher education environments) further marginalise the learning opportunities provided by community-based placements. Rather than viewing this learning as optional we argue that it holds the key to hopeful, strategic and socially just practice.

The University of Sydney has provided social work education for over seven decades. This paper focuses on the experiences of students and staff within the social work program at the University of Sydney; however, it is unlikely these experiences are unique. The curriculum of the Social Work program is shaped by the requirements of the Australian Association of Social Work with students completing two placements (60 days in 3rd year and 80 days in 4th year) in at least two practice settings (e.g., hospital, neighbourhood centre, government agency) in at least two fields of practice (e.g., mental health, child protection, refugee settlement). The Field Education Program is theoretically grounded, based on a learning philosophy in which the student is an active participant and promotes a collaborative learning environment based on partnership between the field, educators and students (Giles, Irwin, Lynch, & Waugh, 2010).

This background provides the context in which the authors have sought to engage students in learning from community-based practice, particularly through community events. The following section identifies a broader international debate concerning these types of field placements.

LITERATURE

Many social work educators and scholars regard field education as social work's signature pedagogy, distinguishing it from other professional education (Bogo, 2015). Within social work, educators and students alike place great significance on 'learning in the field'. Unhelpfully, students make a clear separation between 'classroom' (or theoretical) learning and 'placement' (practice) learning (Inch, 2016). With only two opportunities for placement getting the right placement is significant for students (Scholar, McCaughan, McLaughlin, & Coleman, 2012). Student expectations and hopes are shaped by what they understand to be 'real social work' and their future employment prospects. Although focusing on the UK, Scholar and her colleagues' observation that the narrowing of social work practice by neo-liberalism to individual, statutory work, has diminished the value of so-called 'non-traditional' placements also holds in Australia (Scholar et al., 2012). In the Canadian context, only about 10% of social work MSW practica are in macro practice and few universities provide study concentrations (or streams) in

macro practice (Regehr, Bogo, Donovan, Lim, & Anstice, 2012). Regehr and her colleagues argue that macro practice (involving community organising, administration and policy development) is "central to social work practice and in some way defines the identity of social work" (2012, p. 309). Scholar et al. (2012) argue that "the prefix 'non' [traditional] suggests such placements are of less value, and may encourage students to view themselves as having a poorer deal than their colleagues who are placed in 'traditional' or 'real social work' settings" (2012, p. 933). They quote a student who asks:

Why is this not social work? This is real social work; this is what it should be like. (Scholar et al., 2012, p. 936)

The marginal position of community or macro placements is evident in the literature on social work student learning (Regehr et al., 2012). In the Australian context this is often expressed as placements with 'caseloads' or 'client work' being seen as *real* social work. This is clearly a challenge beyond Australia, with 75% of student respondents in a Northern Ireland study agreeing there was an emphasis on statutory social work throughout their professional training (MacDermott & Campbell, 2016). Bellinger (2010, p. 601) suggests that a profession defined by government or local authority practice creates an environment where "practice learning is constructed as a training ground for efficient employees … Statutory agencies need newly qualified staff who can pick up a full and complex caseload". Also in the UK context, Pugh (2005) suggests that prescriptive managerialism has undermined the social activist agenda and removed any evidence of radical social work from statutory social work provision.

In the US context, Paige Averett, Lena Carawan, and Courtney Burroughs (2012) explored student outcomes from rural community placements in Tillery (rural US). Like the UK and Australia, social work students in the US have less opportunity to engage in macro field placements with grassroots organising, community development and policy development/analysis. Averett and her colleagues' research compared student experiences in direct practice and community organising placements. Interestingly, they found little difference in student micro practice skills (such as working with individuals, communication, dealing with conflict, etc.), but significant difference in macro practice skills (such as advocacy, community organising, project management or policy analysis). Students completing placement in Tillery appear to form a strong attachment to place and a sense of belonging which demanded both relational (micro) and structural (macro) skills (2012, pp. 83–85).

Research on 'non-traditional' placements have identified a range of learning opportunities that arise from engaging more creatively and holistically with disadvantaged people ('clients') (Scholar et al., 2012). Ward's (2005) research revealed the value of 'working alongside' people experiencing social exclusion, with students 'immersed' in their day-to-day struggles. Undertaking research with field instructors in Canada, Regehr et al. identified six competencies related particularly to macro practice: learning and growth; behaviour and relationships; leadership; critical thinking, analysis, planning and implementation; written and verbal professional communication; and values and ethics (2012, pp. 312–314). This and other research (see for example Hafford-Letchfield & Spatcher, 2007; Parker, Hillison, & Wilson, 2003) suggest that community-based practice environments allow students to develop key social

work skills in communication, negotiation and advocacy that are more often associated with individual case work.

The capacity to work collaboratively with community members was a key learning outcome identified by students from Tillery (Averett et al., 2012). Exploring student learning in an arts environment, Taylor and Ballengee-Morris concluded that "we all have a great deal to learn from each other" (2004, p. 10). In a similar vein, Doel, Deacon, and Sawdon highlighted the collaborative nature of learning in non-traditional placement sites, with "more people, and different people" (2007, p. 230) involved in student learning. Students completing placement in Tillery felt students needed to be "mavericks" to be successful, that is open, flexible and self-directed (Averett et al., 2012, p. 84). In conversations, the authors hear students' express frustration about the supports provided within university field education seminars for macro practice and the dominance of individual work in discussions. Similarly, students completing macro-placements in Tillery commented this provided "a totally different perspective than what anybody in that class [field seminar] could give" (Averett et al., 2012, p. 84).

This literature provides the background to explore student learning in community-based placements in Inner Sydney, Australia. In particular, we focus on the learning opportunities provided through organising community events, a common task allocated to students in community-based placements and one we have found students initially resent or misunderstand.

METHODOLOGY

This article draws on a collective process of reflection by the authors on social work student learning in non-traditional placements, in particular those involving the organising of community events. The authors have worked together over several years as field educators, academics and field placement supervisors within the Glebe Community Development Project (discussed in more detail later). The paper arose from our shared interest in student capacities to engage with the learning provided in organising community events. In writing this paper, we engaged in dialogue that was fluid, iterative, open, complex and responsive (Cordeiro, Baldini Soares, & Rittenmeyer, 2017, p. 397). This dialogue focused on our shared experience of the Camperdown Community Day, an examplar of community development practice involving an event that celebrates community identity and the creates a shared story (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2013). Practitioner reflection as a method of gathering data is common in fields such as education (Briggs & Coleman, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and social work (Fook, 1996; Morley, 2008). This approach, like other participatory research:

…seeks to develop practice knowledge to solve a problem in a certain context, no matter whether it is an organizational/technological problem, an education or communication problem, or an even a wider social problem. (Cordeiro et al., 2017, p. 399)

Data on student learning have been gathered through informal conversational interviews and review of placement reports ($N = 33$) with permission (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). De-identified exemplar quotes from student reports are provided in the text of the article. These

quotes have been selected to support the specific argument and are not seeking to represent the views and experiences of all students.

LIMITATIONS

Using student placement reports and our reflections as key data sources has limitations. Student reports are produced as part of the assessment of students' success (or otherwise) whilst on placement. It is our experience that students rarely focus in these reports on negative aspects of their placement. As such, the data had an inherent positive bias. Other research methods, such as interviews or focus groups independent of the teaching program, may uncover different experiences. Our reflections will also be influenced by our commitment to community-based student placements.

Glebe Community Development Project

The Glebe Community Development Project (Glebe CDP) aims to improve the life opport-unities of disadvantaged residents within Glebe and Camperdown, particularly those living in social housing. The Project was established in 2004 as a joint initiative of the then Department of Housing and the Faculty of Education & Social Work at the University of Sydney. It was modelled on other successful university engagement projects within Australia and internationally (Pasque, Smerek, Dwyer, Bowman, & Mallory, 2005) based on a mutually beneficial relationship with neighbouring communities.

The work of the Glebe CDP is informed by the community development practice principles of: building and maintaining relationships with individuals and groups; developing and supporting collaborative working and community participation; enabling communities to take collective action, increase their influence, access resources and participate in managing services; supporting people and organisations to learn together for social change; recognising and respecting diversity and promoting inclusion; promoting and providing empowering leadership (International Association of Community Development (IACD), 2018). These principles are framed by critical theories that focus on confronting structural power including: Frierian consciousness raising (Ledwith, 2017); social capital (building neighbourhood collective levels of trust, reciprocity, and civic engagement) (Oidjarv, 2018); and ontological belonging through collective efficacy (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2013; Bennett, 2015).

The Glebe CDP has become a key learning site for students interested in community development and social justice, within social work and beyond. Glebe CDP has provided nearly 1,000 weeks of student learning to over 50 social work students on placement since 2004. It has also provided learning opportunities for those studying teaching, oral hygiene, nursing, occupational therapy, speech therapy, media studies, human rights and law. Community members actively embrace Glebe as a teaching and learning site, creating opportunities for the co-construction of knowledge. Interestingly, the initiation of the Glebe CDP coincided with Moxley's suggestion in the US context that:

…over the next ten years, higher education may be one of the most important venues for community practice and for social workers who are interested in building learning communities, creating partnerships between colleges and their communities, and in creating and testing new community interventions. (2003, p. 106)

Open Event model

Over the life of the Glebe CDP, over 5,000 residents have participated in community events such as fetes, arts projects and pop-up park family days.

The Glebe CDP has adapted an approach to community events informed by community development principles of listening, relationships, participation, collaborative action and disrupting power known as an 'Open Event', a concept developed by one of the authors through his work (Leapfish, 2018). An Open Event aims to maximise the interactive possibilities of bringing the community together in a live and safe space. An Open Event enacts community development principles to generate new connections and conversations with a focus on breaking down isolation and building belonging. Open Events use an inclusive planning process that starts with a clean slate by asking community members "What do we want to do at this event that will capture the essence of our community and build on it?" As the central theme for the event emerges, local people are identified who may like to be involved, starting the process of building participation and belonging. It is through this process that the Open Event can disrupt power through changing who controls the narrative about that community. A range of specific strategies are used on the event day to ensure it remains 'Open', that is welcoming, inclusive and builds belonging. There is a loose program of activities with plenty of flexibility for the event direction to change in response to unexpected and emerging contributions. An event facilitator or facilitators play a key role in guiding the day through informal and participatory activities, using a positive, playful and curious approach. Stalls and other structures are positioned in a circle formation around a central space, allowing for everyone to be able to see each other. Most of the action for the day happens within this central space. Comfortable resting places, such as a communal café, are provided to facilitate natural interactions and a chance for community members to 'settle' into the event. Stallholders, often from local services, are encouraged to provide interactive activities and to actively participate in the event as whole, thereby encouraging others to also join in.

Camperdown Community Day (CCD)

Camperdown is an inner-city, socially mixed neighbourhood within the City of Sydney Local Government Area. The area dates from the early 1880s with uses as diverse as farming, horse racing, biscuit factories and major hospitals. More recently, the suburb has been gentrified with warehouse conversions and other developments doubling the population between 2001 and 2011 (City of Sydney, 2016). The area enjoys access to high quality community assets such as health services, schools, public transport and commercial centres.

Despite gentrification, housing stock in Camperdown remains diverse with private homes, private rental properties, social housing properties, NGO-managed affordable housing properties and supported housing properties, including a "housing first" model dedicated for formerly homeless tenants. According to the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (SEIFA), those living in social or affordable housing are among the most disadvantaged people in Australia (10th percentile) whilst their neighbours living in private housing are among the wealthiest (79th–100th percentile) (City of Sydney, 2016). Accordingly, residents' life experiences are markedly different, with the potential of conflict arising from high levels of inequality.

CCD was initiated in 2013 response to these diverse experiences and to counter the risk of fractured community belonging from gentrification. The social housing complexes in Camperdown were broadly understood as 'unsafe', 'undesirable' and residents had minimal contact with surrounding residents. Holding an annual Open Event hoped to build neighbourhood social capital (Oidjarv, 2018); strengthen belonging (Bennett, 2015) and support collective efficacy (Vinson & Rawsthorne, 2013). Local residents hoped the event would highlight the strengths within the community.

The CCD was supported by a Planning Committee of predominantly residents (rather than paid community workers) with practical support provided by the Glebe CDP. The design, implementation and evaluation of the CCD becomes the focus of a central learning outcome for BSW students on placement each year. The CCD was held as an Open Event, with opportunities to participate (staffing stalls, games, chocolate wheel), gain new information (with stalls from disability services, health services, material aid and housing advocacy groups) and to connect with new people. Opportunities were created by the Planning Committee to ensure low-income households could participate. As an example, a free photo booth enabled people to have their photos taken in a fun way and local businesses donated hampers for people to take home. The event was welcoming to all residents in Camperdown, regardless of income or housing status.

Student learning through Camperdown Community Day

The authors have all been involved in various elements of the CCD, including in supervising and supporting student learning. We have observed students respond to the learning opportunities provided by the CCD in a range of ways; many have struggled (at least initially) to understand how this task would develop their skills or be relevant to future social work practice. Students' involvement can vary but in general they: participate in the Planning Committee; take responsibility for record keeping (such as taking meeting minutes) and correspondence; undertake research to inform the design of the event through needs assessment; design and distribute promotional material; liaise with stall holders; seek donations from local businesses; source and book resources such as the public address system; communicate with residents in person or electronically about the event; assist with risk management and insurance documentation; liaise with landowners and local councils; participate on the day of the event; problem-solve issues or conflicts that arise on the day; design and collect evaluation data; complete funding reports; and wrap-up with the Planning Committee.

In the following discussion we link student learning to the Australian Association of Social Work Practice Standards (2013).

Knowledge of practice (AASW Practice Standard 4)

The AASW requires that students must be able to practise using a diverse range of social work interventions, including community work, casework, group work, policy development, social action and research. However, the literature outlined earlier suggests that social work students in Australia and elsewhere have fewer opportunities to engage in macro field placements with grassroots organising, community development and policy development/analysis. Whilst community work is listed as a "method of practice", its centrality to the social justice purpose of social work is easily lost by students (Hugman,

2016, pp. 21–23) and it struggles to maintain a foothold in many social work teaching programs. Analysis of student placement reports, both mid-placement and final, confirmed the marginality of community practice in many students' understandings of social work practice.

> Through reflection I realise that this side of social work was something I completely ruled out as something I wanted to do career wise. (3rd Year BSW Student, final placement report)

> I previously felt that I had no real interest in the work, which led me to drag my feet over some tasks and approach work with a great deal of reluctance. (3rd Year BSW Student, mid-placement report)

> The first two weeks I felt unsure about community development and how it would relate to social work practice. Initially, social work practice seemed to me is completed in a clinical setting. However, within the first three to four weeks I learned that social work within the community is crucial. (4th Year BSW Student, mid-placement report)

These students' reflections include the common experience of students having little understanding of the role of social work in community development (or vice versa), despite having successfully completed other elements of their professional degree. This understanding often proved to be a difficult starting point for engagement with activities such as the CCD. Many students struggled to understand how this could be seen as social work, and why social workers might be involved in such activities. They also asked why students did all the "hack work" or what this had to do with their developing professional identity. Rather than being "exemplary" students with a pre-existing passion for community development (Regehr et al., 2012), these students needed a safe learning space in which to ask these questions, to intellectually engage with the experience and time to form an emerging appreciation of community development practice in social work. Making explicit the theoretical basis of community events provided important support for student learning and their capacity to explore this theory in practice, as the following student comments:

> I have read a range of literature whilst on placement, which has spanned community development approaches, social action group work, asset-based practice, feminist theory and feminist social organising and social justice literature on poverty. These readings have further developed my insight into how structural disadvantage operates within communities, and the role of community development in bolstering the strength of communities to address this disadvantage themselves. (4th Year BSW student, mid-placement report)

Understand the role of research and evaluation in obtaining and generating new knowledge for practice (AASW Practice Standard 4.3)

A key task for students involved in CCD and other similar community events is designing, collecting and analysing data. Students are supported to consider what type of data to collect, how and why. In the early stages each year the Planning Committee consults with community members including through survey research. This research explores who and what local people saw as making up "their community", their perceptions of the area, as

well as its social reputation. The findings challenged some students' assumptions about the community and the residents living in social housing. Respondents also provided their ideas on what they would like to experience as part of a local community event. Through undertaking *real* research, students were able to reflect on the application of their research skills to influence practice and inform future strategies. The data collected were used for planning purposes but also for funding accountability, demonstrating to students the importance of research skills in social work practice. In this way community-based placements provide students with the opportunity to develop as practice researchers, as the following student commented:

> Experiencing the social work role in a completely different setting to my last placement [a hospital] has been beneficial because I am being given the opportunity to develop a number of skills that weren't involved in the work I was doing in a hospital setting. For example, the community development setting is providing me with the opportunity to construct and administer surveys and to collate the data that is collected. (4th Year BSW student, mid-placement report)

Students have also been involved in designing creative research methodology that was inclusive such as graffiti boards, Guest Books and post-event focus groups with the Planning Committee for evaluation purposes. Between 2014 and 2016, participation in CCD doubled to approximately 200 people from diverse backgrounds. Survey feedback was collected from 72 participants, with 90% indicating they had met someone new at CCD; 84% indicating they had learnt new information from one of the event stallholders (i.e., local service agencies and organisations) and all stallholders confirming their interest to be involved again in the future. Qualitative data were also collected, via a Guest Book with comments such as: "It was a nice sunny day, it was good to talk with people I know and my neighbour, now I know his name"; "Good to help bridge the divisions between local residents"; "Good to see this becoming an annual get-together. Very diverse people in this community and not a lot of interaction most of the time – so this event helps". Through this research, students were able to link organising a community event to the broader social work goals of promoting increased participation and building a sense of belonging (Bennett, 2015). Involvement in event-related research increased student understanding of the importance of thoughtful planning in order to collect meaningful information from a wide range of people. As part of the wrap-up of the event, students present evaluation data to the Planning Committee and so learn the challenges of managing, analysing and presenting data.

Applying knowledge to practice (AASW Practice Standard 5)

Despite the initial challenges identified by students, immersion in organising a community event such as the CCD provided the opportunity to apply knowledge to practice. Most students appreciated the opportunity to practise their skills and further enhance their knowledge of how systemic factors shape people's life opportunities. An overarching aim of the CCD is to build a sense of belonging and bridge across differences in wealth, housing, age and culture. Students are encouraged to reflect on these differences within a human rights framework which brings attention to the way power is enacted and exercised through our interventions (in this case organising a community event). This could be as simple as ensuring residents from all parts of the community are *serving* others in a mutually respectful way rather than through some form of patronising charity. This sort of deliberate linking of specific

behaviour to broader political context ensured some of the learning was unexpected, disrupting student understanding of power and status. A key element of community work practice is the capacity to step out of the expert role, ensuring projects reflect and are driven by community members which can be experienced by some students as at odds with professional practice. Students are encouraged to read and reflect on debates concerning professionalisation (Hugman, 2016; Ife, 2013). A key learning from placement for many students was increased awareness of the complexity and tensions involved in social work practice.

> My tasks have involved taking minutes for Committee Meetings, co-ordinating some of the decorations for the site, contacting local businesses for donations, promotion, letter-boxing flyers, engaging community groups in participation. Throughout these projects I have tried to connect the practical tasks with social work theories. The event is about building social capital and celebrating the community of the Housing Estate. It showcases the strengths, talents and resources of the residents. It is organised through a local committee of residents and community workers and follows a grassroots, community based process. Social cohesion, grassroots approach, community as experts, inclusivity and connection were the drivers. (3rd Year, BSW Student, final placement report)

The capacity to respond to changing circumstances and make decisions 'on the fly' cannot be taught in tutorials. It requires students to experience this first-hand and to feel comfortable with not being in control. Community events are subject to a range of factors outside of anyone's control, including most obviously, weather, but also unexpected community conflict. Students' involvement at CCD and other similar events created opportunities for them to experience first-hand this lack of control and develop their capacity to think strategically, work collaboratively and problem solve.

> Being flexible while working with community is also a good skill I have learnt as a social worker. As a community it is constantly changing and easily influenced by environmental and other factors, sometimes it does not flow as planned. While working at GCDP, there were times that I have to alter or postpone a plan because tenants or groups raise different ideas about projects or sometimes resources are limited to implement a plan. It was challenging to me in the beginning as personally I prefer to stick to a plan and if the work does not flow as I planned then I feel worried about it. However, through the placement I learnt and understood the nature of community development work and importance of listening to their opinions and responding to community's needs, I was able to accept the changes and flexibility. (3rd Year, BSW student, final placement report)

Communication and interpersonal skills (AASW Practice Standard 6)

A range of specific skills were identified by students from their involvement in CCD and other similar events. These include practice skills identified in the AASW Practice Standards: interpersonal skills; communication skills; the skills of reflective and critical thinking.

The Camperdown community is very diverse in life opportunities and experiences. This diversity was reflected in the Planning Committee, which comprised residents from social housing, housing first residents, private renters and private home owners. Facilitating respectful collaboration and building trust across these differences requires

high level interpersonal and communication skills, modelled by social work field educators. Administrative tasks, such as taking minutes, provided opportunities for students to build core micro-skills such as interpersonal communication and active listening for future social work practice.

> Having been recording a lot of information (minutes at planning meetings) I feel that a strength has been listening skills and an ability to efficiently contextualize a new situation. I have felt these listening skills translate into meaningful engagement with community members in conversation, building on the communication tools learnt in professional practice last semester such as the importance of being present. (3rd Year BSW student, final placement report)

These interpersonal, contextual and deep listening skills are further tested and built when conflict arises. This conflict often reflects oppressive systemic structures such as class, race, gender and age challenging romantic notions of communities (Ife, 2013, p. 21; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011, pp. 32–34). Again, dealing with conflict over something which some students perceive as insignificant such as payments for performers (local v. professionals) provides rich learning for students. Working closely with the Planning Committee to reach fair and socially just decisions leaves students feeling hopeful about people's capacities to acknowledge and respond to difference.

> Experiencing conflict and dealing with difficult colleagues during this placement has challenged me immeasurably, as I have never experienced this in the university context or at work. The experience has allowed me to develop conflict resolution skills and demonstrate assertiveness while being considerate and mindful of others feelings. (4th Year BSW student, final placement report)

Work with others in team environment (AASW Practice Standard 6.3)

The ability to work collaboratively is increasingly being recognised as a core professional quality across a wide range of fields, not just social work (Drinka & Clark, 2016). Despite this recognition, many professions still struggle to work effectively with others (Drinka & Clark, 2016; Hudson, Hardy, Henwood, & Wistow, 1999). Community-based settings provide extensive opportunities to work collaboratively beyond what might be a traditional social work team environment. They require students to work in teams with residents, with people from other disciplines and from other agencies as well as within their own agency. One of the ironies we experience in our social work teaching is the way students' emerging professional identity hinders openness to learning collaborative skills (in some students) (for a more extended discussion of this issue see Ife, 2013, pp. 378–382). Immersing students in the organisation of an event such as CCD demands they practise collaboratively and confront the tricky reality of partnership work, as this student noted:

> My uncertainty when working in partnership with other services has been interesting and challenging. The challenge in working in partnership is expectations all parties such as time spent on project and how decisions are being made, which can create and has been creating uncertainty. I feel that it would be useful to consult with other services

> and define clear roles which would improve teamwork and reduce uncertainty. (4th Year BSW Student, mid-placement report)

DISCUSSION

Social work student learning in organising community events such as CCD suffers from many of the same challenges as community-based or macro placements more generally. Many (but not all) students, regardless of whether in their first or final placement, appear ill-prepared at the commencement of placement within a community-based setting to see the broader picture or to synthesise complex information (Regehr et al., 2012). Many students need specific support to make linkages between, for example, administrative tasks like taking minutes or letter-boxing and social work's commitment to 'the person in the environment' or social justice principles.

Through matching learning opportunities to the AASW Practice Standards we identified important student learning created through facilitating Open Events, including: knowledge of practice; understanding the role of research and evaluation in obtaining and generating new knowledge for practice; applying knowledge to practice; communication and inter-personal skills; and working with others in team environments. It is evident that community events have the potential for creating rich learning opportunities, providing the foundations for hopeful, strategic and socially just social work practice.

A key teaching strategy used by all the authors is to bring to the surface the theoretical foundations of what may appear to be mundane or inconsequential practice or actions (IACD, 2018). Deliberate framing of these activities by critical theories such as Freirean conscious raising, social capital formation, collective efficacy or ontological belonging assisted students in their learning. As the surfacing of theory remains patchy in the field (Ledwith, 2016; Rawsthorne & Howard, 2011), university-based support for student learning needs to be tailored to community-based placements. Tailoring of university-based teaching in this way will go some way to addressing the disconnection between this learning, placement and the social work profession among some students.

In conclusion, our teaching we have been rewarded by what Regeher and colleagues call "exemplar students" who have contributed to our knowledge building with practice-informed theory making, such as the following student.

> My learning came from recording information i.e., taking minutes so the committee could use these to stay on task in between meetings, from building rapport with community members and from seeing and experiencing how community events driven by that community create purpose, cohesion and a great result. I have expanded my knowledge on community development and am able to fathom that it is a journey of process, one that involves patience and discipline. I learnt that in this case the community members viewed the community workers as allies, which in my observation was due to the history of the CCD and the trust that had been built throughout that. This ties into methods to ensure ownership by community – providing the space for them to express ideas and then working with them through the logistics of executing these and coming to

> a decision together on which ideas should be pursued each time. I have also come to realise and strongly acknowledge that the residents are the experts, i.e., they are the self-directed and self-reliant driving force within the community, aiming to consistently build community capacity. I have come to decipher that community development is the backbone to social change. (4th Year BSW, final placement report)

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