

Field Education As A Distinctive Pedagogy For Social Work Education

**Ronnie Egan, Phyllis Chee, Natasha Long,
Sharryn McLean, Janis Parrish & Anna Spencer**

Ronnie Egan – Global, Urban and Social Studies, RMIT, City Campus
Phyllis Chee – School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University
Natasha Long – La Trobe Rural Health School, La Trobe University, Bendigo
Sharryn McLean – School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University
Janis Parrish – School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University
Anna Spencer – Public Health and Social Work, Faculty of Health, QUT

Address for Correspondence:

ronnie.egan@rmit.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This article presents the process for the development of a strategic national statement about field education in Australia. It tracks the thinking of a group of social work field education academics over a nine-month period to ultimately produce a statement about social work field education as a distinctive pedagogy of social work education, for presentation to the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) as part of the 2016 Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) review. The development of an Australian statement began in response to the current crisis in field education relating to a dearth of quality placements available for students who are ready for placement. The article begins with a review of the literature about the American Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) 2008 decision to develop a statement of field education as the signature pedagogy, as well as a review of articles critiquing the American response. From this, the group used Shulman's definition and the literature to produce a strategic statement that could be used to highlight the place of field education in Australia. This raised multiple issues confronting field education teams and prompted further research about the pedagogy informing field education.

Keywords: *Field education, Signature pedagogy, Australian social work education*

INTRODUCTION

Social work programs in Australia are challenged by the changing nature of the human service field and this has implications specifically for field education programs (Cleak & Wilson, 2013). These changes have created an increasing competitive placement environment where universities are pitted against each other to vie for seemingly ever-decreasing placement opportunities (Domakin, 2015). In addition, the practice sector is raising concerns regarding students' abilities and suitability for social work along with the quality of placements. Through collegial field education networks, it became apparent there was a need to develop a response to these issues, and this led to social work field education academics from across Australia gathering at the inaugural National Field Education Network (NFEN) workshop in Melbourne in September 2015.

From here, the NFEN was formed with 186 members across 52 university field education programs, placement agencies, institutes, and field educators and liaison visitors. The NFEN's stated purpose is to facilitate national collaboration in research and better respond to current pressure points and themes related to delivering quality social work field placements. Within the structure of the NFEN is a leadership group comprising a representative from each state and territory who meet monthly to progress issues identified in annual workshops.

With the establishment and momentum of the NFEN, a National Conversation on Field Education was held in Brisbane in April 2016. From here, a group formed to explore and develop the viability of a "signature pedagogy" statement in the Australian context. The focus on developing a statement was to illuminate the place of field education in social work education in Australia with the aim of the statement to be considered for the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation (ASWEAS) review that was being undertaken in 2016. What ensued was a collaboration of six field education academic staff from four Australian universities who shared a passion for field education and were motivated to raise the profile of field education nationally and who realised the significance of this moment in time.

This article explores the development of the Social Work Field Education Pedagogical Statement, beginning with an overview of Australian social work field education and a review of the literature exploring signature pedagogy. This is followed by a summary of the process that was undertaken in the development of the statement and a discussion of its significance for the future of social work field education in Australian social work education.

Field education in Australia

Field placement, field education, clinical placement and *practicum* are terms used to describe the practical experience social work students engage in as they integrate theory and practice in the field. This placement experience has a long history in social work education (Holden, Barker, Rosenberg, Kuppens, & Ferrell, 2011) and is seen as a core component of social work education globally (Domakin, 2015). The Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession, adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IAASW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 2004 make specific mention of standards relating to field education (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). While the standards do not state specifically how much time students should spend

in field education, there is recognition that field education is core to social work programs, “Field education should be sufficient in duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities to ensure that students are prepared for professional practice” (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005, p. 220). In Australia, accredited social work programs must incorporate a minimum of 1,000 hours of field placement in at least two separate fields of practice (AASW, 2012). This length of time allows for both significant learning opportunities and provides significant practice challenges and contexts for all parties involved. It is through these opportunities and challenges that social work students develop their skills and knowledge, and a sense of their professional self as they are socialised into the social work profession (Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, & Huggins, 2010).

While field education is compulsory for students in social work programs (Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016), it requires significant investment from university staff, students and field agencies. The current context of the human service field in Australia is one characterised by instability in funding, a shift to valuing technical skills rather than professional knowledge (Cleak & Smith, 2012), and high workloads for staff in human service agencies who are dealing with increasingly complex client circumstances (Zuchowski, 2015). This has had an impact on the availability of quality placement opportunities for students studying professional degrees (Cleak & Smith, 2012) in a competitive tertiary education market where placements across disciplines have become increasingly difficult to secure (2015). Despite this context, the AASW has held fast to the field education component in social work education programs. In 2012, the minimum hours required actually increased from 980 hours to 1,000 hours of field education (AASW, 2012). While there have been shifts in other aspects of curriculum taught in social work programs in Australia, for example, a shift from specialist to generalist degrees, field education has remained as a constant in the social work curriculum.

Placements provide complex learning opportunities for students that are “pivotal in developing work-ready graduates” (Howard, Johnston, & Agllias, 2015, p. 20). The placement can be a capstone experience of their social work education with students reporting placement as being key in helping them develop their understanding of the profession and developing social work skills. Garthwait (2005, p. 2) states that social work students “usually describe their social work practicum as the single most useful, significant, and powerful learning experience of their formal social work education.” Placement experiences are also key to students’ experiences of professional socialisation (Miller, 2013).

Field education is more than the student’s experience in the field. Field education is the process of learning that occurs when the placement experience is integrated with the field education classes at the university. The authors of this article concur that field education is core to social work education. This belief brought these authors together and generated robust and rich discussion about the pedagogy of field education and, in fact, whether field education is indeed the signature pedagogy of social work. The next step in the process was for the authors to familiarise themselves with the literature about signature pedagogies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE OF SIGNATURE PEDAGOGY

As a starting point for understanding whether field education in social work is the signature pedagogy, the relevant literature was explored, with a particular focus on the definition of signature pedagogy by Shulman (2005).

In this section, the pertinent literature is presented under three themes: linking signature pedagogy to social work field education; the evidence for a signature pedagogy; and the possibilities and challenges in field education being the signature pedagogy.

Linking the signature pedagogy literature to social work field education

Field education is viewed as the heart of social work (Homonoff, 2008, p. 136). It is the most significant component of preparation for social workers going into practice and is the site for bringing together a sense of professional self, by developing confidence and competence in skills of practice, integration of theory and managing ethical issues (Litvak, Mishna, & Bogo, 2010).

Shulman defines signature pedagogies as “the types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions – to learn how to think, to perform and to act with integrity” (2005, p. 52). Does positioning field education in social work as the signature pedagogy meet these requirements? The definitions offered in the literature do not appear to align with this characterisation.

Signature pedagogies are pervasive, routine and habitual, and are distinctive to a profession (Shulman, 2005). Wayne, Bogo, and Raskin (2010) describe several areas where social work field education does not consistently conform to the framework offered by Shulman – social work field education experiences are not usually pervasive beyond minimum standards, they are not routine by nature, they do not always involve public student performance and they do not include accountable talk. They do, however, create heightened emotions and what is termed “adaptive” anxiety for students (Wayne et al., 2010, p. 328). As outlined by Litvak et al. (2010) in their study of emotional reactions of students in field practice settings, social work field placements do create discomfort but also opportunities for learning how to connect personal reactions to professional responses.

Cornell-Swanson (2012) notes for example that, while field placement meets the criterion of being a pervasive capstone apprenticeship, it does not incorporate the importance of the other two temporal patterns of a signature pedagogy – the pervasive initial pedagogy and the sequenced and balanced portfolio. The author argues that these aspects are offered across all stages of the social work learning process, in the field, in the classroom and in simulated learning environments. The combination of these three elements allow the social work student to develop a solid foundation of knowledge about humanities and social sciences, to learn about theoretical concepts, to understand ethical considerations and to engage in practice skills across the three dimensions: surface structure, deep structure, and an implicit structure. Surface structures consist of concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning while deep structures reflect a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how. The implicit structure includes a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions (Shulman, 2005).

Earls Larrison and Korr (2013, p. 196) support the contention that learning as a social work student occurs beyond the field placement, in “our classrooms, in our implicit and explicit curricula, and particularly through the relational teaching–learning encounters between students and educators.” They also add that placements are not unique to social work education but occur in other disciplines. Earls Larrison and Korr signal the potential danger in having an artificial and divisive split between classroom and field, and theory and practice, rather than uniting to develop a shared signature pedagogy.

In discussing signature pedagogies, Doel, Shardlow, & Johnson (2010, p. 5) likens them to a chef’s “signature dish” on a menu. They note that, while we can define signature pedagogy in this way, as something unique or special, we must also pay attention to how this fits with the overall offerings of learning within a social work education program. They caution that fieldwork should not become disengaged from the critical thinking and theoretical aspects of social work. They also argue that the focus of field education as a signature pedagogy in the American Council on Social Work Education Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EAPAS) (CSWE, 2008) places focus on learning competencies, which emphasises what is *done* and not what social work *is*. They note the parallel emergence of the idea of reflective practice in social work, where education is based on the principles of adult learning with an awareness of context and meaning, and note a tension can occur between these learning competencies and reflective practice approaches.

Evidence for a signature pedagogy?

Wayne et al. (2010) and Earls Larrison and Korr (2013) note that practitioners and students often cite social work field education as the most valuable part of their learning experience. This assertion is not, however, supported by quantitative evidence, as Holden et al. (2011) found through their investigations into studies undertaken in North America on social work field education. The authors concluded that there was a need for more robust evidence that field education was central to the curriculum of social work learning and therefore could be viewed as the signature pedagogy.

Cornell-Swanson (2012) discusses how there is a lack of social work educators writing about social work education, both in the literature on the scholarship of teaching and learning and signature pedagogies. The author notes that, within the articles about social work field education as the signature pedagogy, there is no linkage to some of the key components of Shulman’s definition of a signature pedagogy – particularly the temporal patterns and deep structures.

Wayne et al. (2010) note that the signature pedagogy label offers an opportunity for educators to gather better information about learning and teaching processes, which could build a stronger foundation of knowledge and evidence for social work field education. Earls Larrison and Korr (2013, p. 196) also comment that the demarcation as a signature pedagogy raises the profile of social work field education and also may assist in connecting “long-standing theory to practice gaps in the discipline.”

Possibilities and challenges in being the signature pedagogy

The following section reviews the literature about the possibilities and challenges in identifying field education as a signature pedagogy of social work education. Since the CSWE's designation of field education as the signature pedagogy of social work in 2008, attention has focused on the strategic implications for resourcing and supporting field education. The CSWE statement is as follows:

Signature pedagogy represents the central form of instruction and learning in which a profession socializes its students to perform the role of practitioner. Professionals have pedagogical norms with which they connect and integrate theory and practice. In social work, the signature pedagogy is field education. The intent of field education is to connect the theoretical and conceptual contribution of the classroom with the practical world of the practice setting. It is a basic precept of social work education that the two interrelated components of curriculum—classroom and field—are of equal importance within the curriculum, and each contributes to the development of the requisite competencies of professional practice. Field education is systematically designed, supervised, coordinated, and evaluated based on criteria by which students demonstrate the achievement of program competencies (CSWE, 2008).

North American studies offer mixed evidence about whether additional resources were gained by this signature pedagogy debate. Armenta and Linseisen (2015) discuss how there does not appear to be evidence of increased support and strengthening of field education in line with the expectation of being the signature pedagogy. For example, they highlight that resources for liaisons for field placements have generally declined or are more likely to be outsourced. This is despite evidence that field educators are most supported when liaisons are readily and consistently available and linked to the university. Liaison also contributes to capacity building for field education, linking the field educator to the university and offering support as needed, along with developing relationships with agencies in the field.

Armenta and Linseisen (2015) also explore the notion introduced by Earls Larrison and Korr (2013) that integrating classroom and field is essential to creating positive learning experiences in bridging the two settings through a model of integrated field/classroom. The students are supported and taught across the classroom and into the field by a clinical professor/clinical faculty liaison. This role involves offering the classroom relational experience, the foundation coursework and links and supports students in the field as the constant point of mentoring and teaching.

Lyster (2012) argues that elevating field education's status to a signature pedagogy of social work education requires a greater integration and understanding of the value and role of field directors as leaders within schools of social work. She notes that, while field directors are often in positions of potential influence, holding knowledge about the intersection of curriculum, students and the field, they often experience a lack of resources and low levels of authority to achieve their goals. While, on the one hand, field education is being elevated as a signature pedagogy, on the other, universities are becoming less accommodating places for field education. She cites examples of directors being appointed in non-faculty roles and experiencing career obstacles. In addition, Lyster points to a level of "inertia" in field education, where there have been few significant changes to approaches in practice since

the 1970s. She suggests that field directors have a unique perspective to offer in both articulating and advancing the vision of field education and in linking universities to their communities. Importantly, these links can introduce opportunities for research to inform the further development of learning and teaching in the field.

In designating field education as a signature pedagogy, approaches and resources for supporting and developing the capacity of field educators are also considered. This aspect was partly addressed by Dedman and Bierlein Palmer (2011), who sought the perspectives of field educators in accepting online training as social work student supervisors. Previous studies of field instructors and field placement directors had indicated that there were a number of impediments to undertaking training. Field directors noted fewer resources, challenges in gaining field supervisors' participation in training and a broad range of content being offered in training as barriers. The study noted that time was a restriction on field educators hosting students, and explored whether online methods of continuing education would be accepted by the field. The survey of over 600 instructors produced 208 responses, and the majority of these were open to online learning opportunities. Some of the participants, however, were cautious about not having access to face-to-face training and had reservations about a lack of engagement with others when online.

Taylor (2016), in exploring the changes to curriculum of social work education and associated pressure points in the UK, notes the focus of government on social workers being employable rather than spending time in the classroom. She notes that society, and also social work education, is prioritising operationality rather than meaning, and that the curriculum for social work is becoming too prescriptive. This leads, she argues, to limitations in innovation in curriculum design across social work programs in the UK and social work practitioners having low confidence in their own professional judgement. She comments on the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in strengthening the social work education curriculum, including social workers in the field, clients, educators, students, employers and professional associations, which is also supported by Preston, George, and Silver (2014). They suggest that field education remains currently undervalued and explore how traditional field education models have become conservative in the face of neoliberalism, and deliver a limited experience of social work without opportunities to challenge assumptions, build alliances and work towards change. They suggest that we can leverage the centrality of field education to social work more fully, and create opportunities to reinvent field education with a critical and activist lens. Similarly, in Hay and Brown's (2015) work in New Zealand – they focus on the perspective of the human service manager for their contribution to social work education. They argue, ultimately the manager becomes the employer of social work graduates, and should have a place in determining what personal and interpersonal capabilities are necessary in the workplace and therefore included in the curriculum.

In reviewing the available literature on social work field education as the signature pedagogy, the authors of this article came to the conclusion that our discussion about field education was more accurately framed as one about field education as a distinctive pedagogy. While recognising the particular and important contribution of field placements to the emerging social work professional, we see that this learning does (and needs to) occur

in concert with coursework within the classroom. The framing of our thinking about social work field education through the lens of a signature pedagogy has been helpful in allowing us to question, reflect, debate and inquire openly about our learning and teaching approaches.

However, we are interested in thinking more about how we can continue to strengthen our teaching and learning approaches in field education for social workers through research and inquiry, and note the need for greater focus on resourcing and support of all aspects and stakeholders in field education. While interested in the findings of the studies linking social work field education to the signature pedagogy framework – more study and research is required to illuminate our teaching and learning methods in field education to address the gaps in evidence and assess how well they are working for all concerned and to develop creative responses to the challenges of field education. As Preston et al. (2014) note, social work practice and education – in the field and classroom – both shape and are shaped by each other.

Developing a Social Work Field Education Pedagogical Statement: the process

At the Australian NFEN Brisbane National Conversation on Field Education in April 2016 a small group of university field education staff met to discuss the possibility of preparing a statement about field education as the distinctive pedagogy of Social Work Education in Australia. The motivation for this small group was the attendance of Professor Marion Bogo, who had discussed her involvement in the development of the 2008 American Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) statement which identified field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education outlined earlier.

The discussion with Professor Bogo provided an historical critique about the strategic rationale behind this statement and the critical response in the literature that followed the 2008 EPAS statement. In America at that time, there was crisis in Social Work Field Education in finding enough quality placements for the nationwide cohort of social work students. This crisis led to a Field Education Summit in 2014 (CSWE, 2015) to discuss responses. One of these was to raise the profile of field education across America and the development of the signature pedagogy statement as a strategic attempt to shift the emphasis towards field education in social work education. The establishment of an Australian Field Education Network emerged from a similar crisis facing field education staff in Australian universities. One thing, from the literature and our discussion was clear, Field Education as the signature pedagogy of social work education was contested and there was limited evidence to make the assertion. In the 2012 ASWEAS, whilst there is reference to pedagogy in the principles, there is no further discussion about pedagogy, leaving schools of social work to continue to use pedagogies of field education that are over 40 years old.

It was from this position that the present authors made a commitment to begin the process of examining whether the preparation of a statement of Field Education as a signature pedagogy in Australia might be one of a range of useful strategies to elevate the status and practice of field education in higher education. From the Brisbane meeting, the group, from four Australian social work programs, worked on developing a statement that would raise the profile of Australian field education in social work education. The start of this process was to understand the key components of signature pedagogy, which Shulman (2005b)

explains as characteristic forms of teaching and learning used in a particular profession. We used the questions of Shulman (2005), Wayne et al. (2010) and Earls Larrison and Korr (2013) to understand the literature both in support and against the signature pedagogy claim.

From this analysis and through Skype conversations we concluded that social work field education did not meet the criteria for a signature pedagogy according to Shulman (2005); rather we discussed the notion of a *distinctive* pedagogy, alongside other forms of classroom teaching and learning. Distinctive means characteristic, distinguishing, typical, which takes account of the unique ways that social work field education informs the socialisation process while students are on placement. From this position, the group then began the process of developing a statement of distinctive pedagogy for consultation with the key stakeholders in social work field education, the members of NFEN, the AASW and Australian Council of Heads of School (ACHOS). The drafting involved different members developing aspects of the statement, joining these together in a statement, with the critique of the signature pedagogy claim, firmly in place.

Stakeholder consultation with the NFEN members

This development of the statement took over six months with the intent of drafting the statement for presentation and discussion at the NFEN annual workshop in September, 2016 for their input. In reviewing the literature for and against the signature pedagogy approach, different elements of field education were identified including: the integration of classroom knowledge with field experience; the beginning socialisation into the profession; providing real-life experiences over a prolonged period of time and experiencing the complexity of the work and workplace. Shulman (2005) places emphasis on the purpose of education to achieve practice and we did not identify it as a signature pedagogy, rather the draft statement used “distinctive pedagogy”:

Social work education prepares students for professional practice through learning core and common knowledge, skills and values that can be applied across diverse practice settings. Field education is a distinctive pedagogy for social work. It provides students the opportunity to integrate classroom learning with practice. Both the classroom and field components play an integral part in developing students' ways of thinking, doing and being. Field education socializes students into the profession through immersion in a real practice context where students have the opportunity to make sense of what it means to be a social worker and to develop their professional identity, integrity and ethical practice. In field education, students are required to sustain a high level of engagement over a significant period of time in collaboration and partnership with industry. In having to practice and perform, students experience more profoundly the complex, ambiguous and indeterminate nature of practice. As students take responsibility for their learning, this experience significantly shifts and transforms the student's praxis. With supervision, students develop their ability to engage in critical reflection, to explore different ways of understanding and responding to diverse and often unique practice situations and to learn to practice creatively. These attributes are further informed by social work core values of social justice, human rights, human dignity and equity. (September, 2016)

In order to test the statement, we developed three questions to shape our discussion at the NFEN workshop in Townsville:

1. What does this statement mean to me?
2. How could this statement be used to increase the profile of field education (in the AWEAS, with in universities, in the field, with the AASW, etc.)?
3. What next? What action can now be taken by you, the Network, others, in relation to using the statement to elevate the profile of field education?

These questions lead to robust discussion about the statement at the workshop. Discussion focused on the language in the statement and some minor changes were suggested. There was also discussion about how the statement can be promoted, circulated and strategically used to position field education more centrally into the curriculum, increase field education resources, build the evidence base of field education and promote better relationships between universities and the field.

At the end of the workshop, consensus was reached to submit the statement (subject to minor amendments) to the ASWEAS review.

After the workshop, the signature pedagogy group met again by Skype/phone and discussed the suggested amendments. The final Social Work Field Education Pedagogical Statement submitted for the ASWEAS review was:

Social work education prepares students for entering professional practice through acquiring core knowledge, skills and values that can be applied across various practice settings and using a range of modalities.

Field education is a distinctive pedagogy for social work.

It enables students to integrate classroom learning with practice, so that students notice and refine their ways of thinking, doing and being.

Field education socializes students into the profession through an immersion in real practice contexts, while allowing a constructive and reciprocal learning space to develop.

Students make sense of what it means to be a social worker by developing their professional identity, integrity and practice framework.

Supported by field education partners in agencies, students sustain a high level of engagement over a significant period of time, to experiment, reflect and learn from experiences.

Supervision during field education embeds the core social work values of respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity.

In this relationship, students develop their ability to critically reflect, to connect theory to practice, to understand and respond to diverse needs and situations and to practice creatively.

In practicing, receiving feedback and then adapting their thinking and approach, students understand the complex, changing and ambiguous nature of practice.

As students take responsibility for their learning, this experience significantly shifts and transforms student's praxis. (October, 2016)

The final version of the statement was presented by a member of the NFEN leadership group at a stakeholder consultation with the ACHOS. The statement was also presented by a member of the NFEN leadership group at a round table stakeholder discussion with the AASW. The key strategic value of Field Education as a distinctive pedagogy was to use the statement in the ASEWAS review which began in 2016. It is unclear how the statement will be incorporated into the ASWEAS review. However, it was received positively in the AASW consultation forums.

Relevance, representation and scope

As outlined in this article, the process used is indicative of the commitment to develop a statement on field education as distinctive pedagogy in social work education that reflects the current state of field education in Australia and relevant to Australian context. The statement provides the standards to strive for in field education and the tenets to develop clear pedagogical goals for social work field education within the broader social work curriculum. So far, the statement has provided a platform for considerable engagement with members of NFEN. The membership of NFEN has field education as central to their work. This consultative process ensures key elements, that views of this core group of field education staff in Australia are heard, considered and included and that the final statement submitted for the ASWEAS review has the endorsement of NFEN. The consultative process used started the conversation but, more importantly, it built a certain degree of ownership to continue these conversations into their schools/programs and the field.

Moving from aspiration to action

The discussion on the relevance, representation and scope of this statement follows that, in addition to providing a sense of direction, guidelines are required as to how field education as a distinctive pedagogy can purposely inform curriculum planning and integration into existing practices.

One key strategic plan is for the statement to be used in the ASWEAS review. At the point of writing this article, the ASWEAS review is in its final stage. Feedback from the ASWEAS review consultative forums indicated that this statement was positively received. Its scope would depend on how it is included and integrated into the ASWEAS. Further strategic plans need to be developed based on the new ASWEAS.

When set up well, students' experiences on field placements is a powerful way of learning that often transforms them. While the literature strongly supports the view that field education is a significant if not the most significant learning experience for social work students, it is important to think deeply about what this means and how a distinctive pedagogy can be translated into the curriculum. The value of a statement such as this is that it brings the distinctive pedagogy into greater visibility and enables critical conversations on field education.

Despite its importance, the provision of quality field education is increasingly a challenge. Field education is under tremendous stress for reasons highlighted earlier in this article. When these factors are not adequately addressed, it adversely impacts on field education achieving its full potential as a distinctive pedagogy.

The university

Literature that discuss how field education is under significant stress (Healy & Lonne, 2010) often highlight that responding to a crisis in field education must not simply be the responsibility of field education co-ordinators or staff. A school-level response is needed. A well-incorporated statement on distinctive pedagogy in ASWEAS will set the direction for schools of social work. Holosko and Skinner (2015) argue that “if a school adopted a more field-centric orientation in their respective curricula, leading the school to eventually adopt the signature pedagogy will become a much easier task for the FC (Field Coordinator) (p. 279). Elevating the position of field director, appointment of a faculty member and advancing the partnership between field director and dean/director (Lyter, 2012, p. 187) lifts the status of field education and has implications for funding and resourcing.

A curriculum informed by strong educational rationale and pedagogy informs the way field education is delivered and resourced. The field education component shifts from class-based delivery to a highly individualised focus given to each student in how they are matched with an agency, assigned field supervisors and assisted in developing individual placement learning opportunities and contracts and so on. This individualised approach requires an increase in resources allocated for field education such as university staffing, costs of field supervision and costs of conducting liaison visits.

The field

The field plays a pivotal role in field education. Organisations and agencies are learning sites that extend beyond classroom and campuses. Similarly, it is important for organisations and agencies to participate in universities’ field education programs for reasons that students on field placements bring the visibility of the agencies, their cause and practice to their peers. Agencies can appreciate the benefit for different cohorts of social work students to be exposed to their field of practice through field placements. Students often also contribute to the work of agencies. There are mutual benefits for both universities and agencies to collaborate in providing field education.

Universities’ relationships with field educators and agencies continue to be a dominant approach to securing field placement opportunities. Despite these relationships, seldom are there guaranteed agreements in place for placements. The vast majority of student placements have to be negotiated each semester. This way of sourcing placements is unsustainable in the current Australian field education context.

Agencies and individual social work practitioners are finding it increasingly difficult to offer student placements for reasons discussed earlier. Universities, on the other hand, are increasing student numbers with little consultation with the field regarding their capacity to provide student placements. Unlike universities’ prerogative to decide on increasing class sizes, number of classes or adopt different modes of delivery to cater to higher student enrolment, the

shortage of field placements cannot be unilaterally resolved. The statement highlights the field as a key stakeholder in the provision of field education. Negotiations need to take place at a higher level between organisations and universities. The question is how can the statement and the new ASWEAS be used to provide guidelines for this to occur?

Structuring field education

The field has been very involved in field education in the past and while it continues to be, the arrangement has changed in recent years. The previous mode of supervision where social work practitioners offer their time on a voluntary basis was the dominant arrangement in the past. This is no longer the case. Increasingly, universities are providing external social work field supervision to support student placements. It is timely to rethink the model of field education that relies on the professional commitment of agencies and social workers to voluntarily provide field education (Frumkin, 1980). Bogo (2013), when making reference to Frumkin, stressed that it was time to give attention to the way we structure social work education. Her university experiences a similar situation to many Australian universities in having to employ “highly-experienced social workers to provide additional supervision to students who are in agencies where, generally, the supervision is not provided by social workers” (Bogo, 2013, para. 92).

Researching field education and building the scholarship

The importance of research in field education cannot be overstated. The literature review highlighted the lack of research in field education (Cornell-Swanson, 2012; Holden et al., 2011). The need for more research, both qualitative and quantitative, that contributes to a critical mass of knowledge in field education is essential in understanding, evidencing and articulating field education as a distinctive pedagogy in social work education. Research enhances the rigor in examining how students learn and how deeper and transformative learning occurs. It looks at key factors that help or hinder student field learning experience and highlights the complex combination of key stakeholders coming together to support a successful placement. More research is also needed to examine the collaborative partnership between the field and university and the necessary policy and investment of resources towards provision of high quality field placements. The distinctive pedagogy statement, similar to that of the signature pedagogy, provides an impetus for educators to engage in research that further informs and strengthens the learning and teaching processes in field education (Earls Larrison & Korr, 2013; Wayne et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

This article describes a process for developing a statement about Australian Field Education as a distinctive pedagogy, to be included in the ASWEAS review. A key limitation is the lack of research that maps the student field education experience in the crisis context of securing enough quality placements needed with increasing numbers of social work student enrolments. How this crisis impacts or shapes the pedagogical models of practice in social work education remains unclear but research which explores the impact adds to future conceptual and structural considerations in field education.

References

- Armenta, K., & Linseisen, T. (2015). The indispensable faculty liaison within the signature pedagogy: The integrated field/classroom model (IFCM) as an example. *Field Educator*, 5(1), 1–6.
- Australian Association of Social Work (AASW). (2012). *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) 2012 Guideline 1.2: Guidance on field education programs*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3553>
- Australian Association of Social Work (AASW). (2015). *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) 2012 VI.4*. Retrieved from <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3550>
- Bogo, M. (2013). The field educator, Simmons School of Social Work, Vol. 3.2 (Fall). Conversations. Retrieved from <http://fieldeducator.simmons.edu/article/marion-bogo-on-field-education/>
- Boitel, C. R., & Fromm, L. R. (2014). Defining signature pedagogy in social work education: learning theory and the learning contract. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 50(4), 608–622.
- Cleak, H., & Smith, D. (2012). Student satisfaction with models of field placement supervision, *Australian Social Work*, 65(2), 243–258, doi: 10.1080/0312407X.2011.572981
- Cornell-Swanson, L. (2012). Toward a comprehensive signature pedagogy in social work education. In N. L. Chick, A. Haynie, & R. A. R. Gurung (Eds.), *Exploring more signature pedagogies: Approaches to teaching disciplinary habits of mind* (203–216) Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Council on Social Work Education. (2008). Educational policy and accreditation standards. Retrieved from [http://www.cswe.org/Kentico82/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2008-EPAS/2008EDUCATIONALPOLICYANDACCREDITATIONSTANDARDS\(EPAS\)-08-24-2012.pdf.aspx](http://www.cswe.org/Kentico82/getattachment/Accreditation/Standards-and-Policies/2008-EPAS/2008EDUCATIONALPOLICYANDACCREDITATIONSTANDARDS(EPAS)-08-24-2012.pdf.aspx)
- Dedman, D. E., & Bierlein Palmer, L. (2011). Field instructors and online training: An exploratory survey. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(1), 151–161.
- Doel, M., Shardlow, S. M., & Johnson, P. G. (2011). Contemporary field social work: Integrating field and classroom experience. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Domakin, A. (2015). The importance of practice learning in social work: Do we practice what we preach? *Social Work Education*, 34(4), 399–413. dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2015.1026251
- Earls Larrison, T., & Korr, W. S. (2013). Does social work have a signature pedagogy? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49(2), 194–206. dx.doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2013.768102
- Frumkin, M. (1980). Social work education and the professional commitment fallacy: A practical guide to field–school relations. *Journal of Education for Social Work*, 16(2), 91–189.
- Garthwait, C. L. (2005). *The social work practicum: A guide and workbook for students*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Hay, K., & Brown, K. (2015). Social work practice placements in Aotearoa New Zealand: Agency managers' perspectives. *Social Work Education*, 34(6), 700–715.
- Healy, K., & Lonnie, B. (2010). *The social work and human services workforce: Report from a national study of education, training and workforce needs*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Hemy, M., Boddy, J., Chee, P., & Sauvage, D. (2016). Social Work Students 'Juggling' Field Placement. *Social Work Education*. dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2015.1125878
- Hill, N., Egan, R., Cleak, H., Laughton J., & Ervin, L. (2015, May). *The sustainability of social work placements in a shifting landscape* {abstract}. Paper presented at the International Conference on Discovery and Innovation in Social Work Practicum Education, Hong Kong, China. Abstract retrieved from http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ss_cfepe2015/document.aspx?lang=en
- Holden, G., Barker, K., Rosenberg, G., Kuppens, S., & Ferrell, L. W. (2011). The signature pedagogy of social work? An investigation of the evidence. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 21(3), 363–372.
- Holosko, M., & Skinner, J. (2015). A call for field coordination leadership to implement the signature pedagogy. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 25(3), 275–283, doi:1080/10911359.2015.1005519
- Homonoff, E. (2008). The heart of social work: Best practitioners rise to challenges in field instruction. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 27(2), 135–169.
- Howard A., Johnston, L., & Agllias, K. (2015). Ready or not: Workplace perspectives on work-readiness indicators in social work graduates. *Advances in Social Work and Welfare Education*, 17(2), 7–22.

- Litvak, A., Mishna, F., & Bogo, M. (2010). Emotional reactions of students in field education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48(2), 227–243.
- Lyter, S. C. (2012). Potential of field education as signature pedagogy: the field director role. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 48(1), 179–188.
- Miller, S. (2013). Professional socialization: A bridge between the explicit and implicit curricula. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49(3), 368–386. dx.doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2013.796773
- Preston, S., George, P., & Silver, S. (2014). Field education in social work: The need for reimagining. *Critical Social Work*, 15(1). Retrieved from http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/field_education_SW
- Shulman, L. S. (2005). Signature pedagogies in the professions. *Daedalus*, 134(3), 52–59.
- Sewpaul, V. & Jones, D., (2005). Global standards for the education and training of the social work profession. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14, 218-230
- Taylor, I. (2016). Whose curriculum is it anyway? Globalisation, social work education and knowledge. In M. Bogo, M. Lefevre, & B. Teater (Eds.). *Routledge international handbook of social work education*. Routledge, Oxon.
- Van Onselen, P. (2015, January 10). Reforming higher education should go beyond fee deregulation. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au>
- Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2010). Field education as the signature pedagogy of social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(3), 327–339. doi:10.5175/JJSWE.2010.200900043
- Williamson, S., Hostetter, C., Byers, C., & Huggins, P. (2010). I found myself at this practicum: Student reflections on field education. *Advances in Social Work*, 11(2), 235–247.
- Zuchowski, I. (2015). Being the university: Liaison persons' reflections on placements with off-site supervision. *Social Work Education*, 34(3), 301–314. dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2015.1005070