

Space, Time and Relationships for Professional Growth: The Experiences of External Field Education Supervisors

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ABSTRACT

Social work field education focuses on preparing students for professional practice. It relies on experienced social workers facilitating the socialisation of social work students into the profession. Generally this socialisation is assumed to take place through an apprenticeship-type model where students are placed to work alongside experienced social workers. However, providing placement opportunities for social work students with social work qualified supervisors on site is becoming more difficult. There is an increase in placements with off-site supervision, where qualified social workers situated outside the placement organisations provide the social work supervision additional to supervision provided internally in the organisations. Previous research has illuminated some of the context of off-site supervision, but little is known about external supervisors' experience of supporting social work students on placement.

This paper seeks to illuminate the specific experiences, views and concerns shared by external social work supervisors about social work placements with external supervision. The data discussed here are a subset of data derived from PhD research exploring the experiences of key stakeholders involved in placements with external supervision in Australia. External supervisors highlighted the challenges and opportunities posed by external supervision. They discussed the importance of creating space and time for formal supervision with a primary focus on promoting student's professional growth. External supervisors foregrounded relationship building and role clarification as important prerequisites of working supervision arrangements.

Keywords: *Social work education; Field education; External supervision; Supervisors*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The context of field education in Australia

Field education is a defining moment in a social work degree. Here students apply what they have learnt in theory into practice (Homonoff, 2008) and their ability to work in human services is tested (Razack, 2000). Students experience in field education is guided, supported and supervised by a qualified social work practitioner (AASW, 2012a), the idea being that field education provides a hands-on, practical experience where students undertake “...training as an apprenticeship in social work” (Camilleri, 2001, p. 17). The professional social work association (Australian Association of Social Work [AASW]) describes field education as “learning for practice” (AASW, 2012b) and expects social work students to undertake a total of 1000 hours of field education with the social work supervisor formally supervising the student and guiding their learning (AASW, 2012a).

Social work placements in Australia cannot be observational only (AASW, 2012a), and research shows that students seek field education opportunities that encourage autonomy and foster professional growth. They look for supervisors who are available to have their way of working observed, and who are respectful, communicative, informed, responsive and supportive to students (Barretti, 2007). Research highlights, however, that students in field education at times found it hard to access supervision (Patford, 2000), and that social work supervisors were not always able to be observed or, at times, exemplified questionable practice (Barretti, 2007). Work-load issues, low staff-retention rates, staff recruitment issues and the challenges of a crisis-driven environment make it difficult for social work field educators to assist students’ professional growth in field education (Chinnery & Beddoe, 2011). Thus, consideration has to be given to whether the traditional model of social work field education which places a social work student in a human service organisation with an experienced social work supervisor on site to learn from (Camilleri, 2001) is consistently attainable and working well.

Practice, and thus field education, in the human services field is impacted by neoliberalism and New Public Management. Impacts in the widest sense include the de-professionalisation of social work (Healy, 2004; Morley & Dunstan, 2013), heavy workloads that often are not decreased by management when supervisors take on the extra responsibilities of a field educator (Moriarty et al., 2009), as well as a culture of audits, austerity, risk management, and welfare reforms that change the heart of social work and lead to less worker autonomy (Chenoweth, 2012). The high demands on social workers, including increased accountability, limited discretionary powers, high and complex case loads and lack of managerial support strain social workers (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcombe, 2012) and limit their ability to support students (Barton, Bell, & Bowles, 2005). Therefore, there seems to be a shift to utilising private practitioners, externally paid social workers to provide the student supervision in agencies that might not generally employ social workers or who are too stretched to support social work students without outside help. Little is known about their experiences and insights about providing external supervision to social work students. Exploring

the off-site supervisors' contribution to, and experience in, placements with external supervision can help us develop practice in this area.

External supervision in field education

Generally, placements with external supervision are seen as a last resort (Abram, Hartung, & Wernet, 2000) and while the AASW permits off-site supervision in field education directs that students should undertake only one placement with external supervision (AASW, 2012a). Placements with external supervision are becoming more frequent because of rising student numbers, competition between educational institutions for field education places (Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2006) and pressures on the human service field (Barton et al., 2005). Moreover, they can also be a necessity in rural areas where there is a lack of professionally qualified social workers (Alston, 2007; Unger, 2003).

Students may be more satisfied in placements with internal supervision (Cleak & Smith, 2012). Yet, whether the social work supervision is provided internally or externally may not be the crucial point in student satisfaction with placement, rather their ideal placement set-up might depend on what they wanted to learn, how this was supported and their own preparation and that of their supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013a). Nevertheless, placements with external supervision have potential challenges, including the lack of clearly defined social work roles, the importance of acknowledging and valuing the skills of on-site supervisors, and the complexity of a four-way process of assessment and reporting (Plath, 2003).

Placements with external supervision require effective triad relationships (Abram et al., 2000), good matching processes and role clarifications (Zuchowski, 2013a), collaboration and planning between supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013b), and extra support, training and recognition for the task supervisors (Henderson, 2010). In Henderson's research external social work supervisors and internal task supervisors expressed that it was important to be matched to the other supervisor and to maintain regular communication for good working relationships. Henderson's (2010) British research points to the pay inequity between the different supervisors in light of the fact that the external supervisor was receiving a fee for providing the supervision.

There is little research exploring the experiences of external supervisors in field education. Karban's (1999) US-based study from the 1990s explores the views of students and external supervisors. External supervisors highlighted the importance of building relationships, getting to know the student and concerns about not being able to observe students' practice. External supervisors enjoyed the role and its challenges, valued the "distance" a separate location provided, and the ability to spend focused time with the student (Karbon, 1999). It is important to explore the experiences of external supervisors further to get a picture of current and local views of external supervisors that can help us understand and build practice guidelines for placements with external supervision.

Supervision in field education

Supervision in placements with external supervision needs to be better understood. The AASW requires social work supervision in field education for the professional growth of students (AASW, 2012a). Research shows that supervision can help students achieve

professional identity and purpose, personal integrity and professional competence (Lizzio & Wilson, 2002). Field educators can use supervision to build opportunities for critical reflection for students (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Supervision can provide spaces for the supervisee to understand learning processes and examine and correct underlying assumptions of their practice and allow transformative learning to occur (Carroll, 2010).

Building the supervisory relationship is, then, an important task. The quality of this relationship influences the success of supervision (McMahon, 2002) and the student-supervisor relationship facilitates social work learning on placement (Cleak & Smith, 2012). External supervisors thus face a complex task of supporting student learning and facilitating the professional formation of social work students (AASW, 2012a) when another supervisor is overseeing and guiding the day-to-day engagement of the student in a placement organisation the supervisor may not know well. It is important to explore how external supervisors engage with others and the organisation, and how professional growth of students is supported in these placements.

METHODOLOGY

This paper specifically focuses on the experience reported by 15 participants in their role as external supervisors of social work students (Zuchowski, 2013a). In a larger study 32 participants participated in semi-structured interviews, sharing and exploring their experience as students, field educators, task supervisors and/or liaison persons involved in social work placements with external supervision. The aims of the research are to review these placements to explore the experiences and relationships of key players in these placements, to investigate what external supervision brings to field education and to develop a model/framework or principles for field education with external supervision. The interviews were conducted in 2011/ 2012 after the study was approved by the University Ethics Committee.

This qualitative research is framed by phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) and social constructivism (Schwandt, 1994). Relevant to phenomenology I aimed to gain the experiences and attributed meanings of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), for this article foregrounding the meaning-making and views of the external/off-site social work supervisors.

Sampling and Data Collection

Information about the study was sent to Australian universities and advertised via national social work conference presentations. External supervisors, task supervisors, liaison persons and students with experience in social work student placements with external supervision were invited via a purposive method of sampling (Creswell, 2007) to participate in this project. The research attracted participants associated with social work programs in Australian universities in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia.

Fifteen participants identified as having supported social work student placements as external supervisors. The participants were experienced social workers, having worked in the social

welfare sector and or social work education for between 5 and 40 years. There were 10 female and 5 male participants. The great majority of participants drew on numerous experiences as external supervisors of social students. In the process of creating pseudonyms for participants the gender of the participant, their experience, background information and their role has remained unaltered.

Semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences as external supervisors in social work field education and their views about placements with external supervision. A recursive approach to interviewing, that uses an interview guide, but follows the lead of the participants in the interview, enabled the gathering of rich data (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). Interview questions covered the participants' experiences of placements with external supervision, the relationships with the student, liaison person and the external supervisor, and their vision of the ideal placement.

Data Analysis

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

Limitations

Participants in this study have self-selected into the study and have chosen what they want to share in the interviews, thus reality is explored as the participant presents it, reliant on their recollection and reflection (Minichiello et al., 2008). Participants' self-selection may be based on a special interest and awareness of social work field education or external supervision. The data presented here limits the discussion to the experiences of external supervisors rather than looking at external supervision more holistically.

My intention has been to come at this with fresh eyes in line with phenomenological research, by attempting to bracket my own experiences and positions (LeVasseur, 2003). Thus, I summarised and reflected on my own experiences prior to interviewing and, in the data analysis, approached each group of participants separately with the intention of focusing on the voice of each participant group. I recognised that I have had experience in placements with external supervision as a student, external supervisor and as a liaison person, thus am positioned as an insider in this research. This may have impacted on the choice of focus, the interviews and the analysis (Minichiello et al., 2008). My insider status may have also affected the participants' reflections, as participants potentially could have assumed a shared understanding.

FINDINGS

A separate discussion questions exactly how external that "external" supervision can be for external supervisors of social work placement students and explores the expressed

need of external supervisors understand the context of the placement, the student and the parties involved in order from the to be able to deliver quality supervision, feedback and assessment (Zuchowski, 2013b). External supervisors build relationships and clarify roles to gain contextual understanding of the overall placement, placement setting and student. Appropriately matching students to placements and resourcing of field educators are important (Zuchowski, 2013b).

This paper illuminates the overall experiences of external supervisors in placements where they have provided external supervision. It presents the external supervisors' reflections on the opportunities and challenges of placements with external supervision, the supervision focus and their discussion of their relationships with others. Participants suggested that external supervision assisted students in their learning and growth, but that the limited insight into the placement, the task supervisor's busyness and at times the lack of task supervisors' and human service organisations' understanding of the social work posed challenges. Supervision, as described by the participants, focused on the professional growth of students, and social work framework, values and theories. Participants described the relationships they had with others more in terms of individual relationships between key stakeholders rather than four-way relationships.

OPPORTUNITIES

In reflecting on their experience as external supervisors of social work students, participants highlighted a number of opportunities for professional growth that these placements offered to students, the field and themselves. Participants suggested that students can reflect more openly, that the external supervision brought a fresh perspective, that external supervision ensures that students actually received supervision and that it was beneficial to have supervision in a separate space.

Iona, for example, highlighted that an external person and a separate space can facilitate more open reflection on the learning experience:

Sometimes I think it is about issues they want to raise about what is happening for them on placement that relate to the agency and they don't feel comfortable doing that in the agency context, ... sometimes I think that students are feeling really very pressured in placement, whether that is related to the placement or the broader context for them and it's about the time and space, it's a bit strange, but part of me feels it's a little bit about that time and space of actually being away.

Participants reflected that external supervision also opened up the opportunity for fresh perspectives. Karen, for instance, highlights that:

They were more than happy with what he was doing, but he fed back that he was really enjoying being challenged in supervision and to have a different perspective when I asked questions about why was that. Why have you done it that why? How else could you have looked at this? External supervision was seen as offering a separate space for exploration of issues, but also a means of supervision actually happening.

Iona shared the following reflection:

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

Some participants also highlighted that external supervision was an investment and an opportunity for professional development in the field. Participants talked about modelling the importance of supervision and transitioning to professional supervision practice. However, this was also seen as an opportunity to model to the human service field the value of social work, an opportunity to open up new field of practice (Zuchowski, 2011).

It is a good opportunity to put the focus of what skills a competent social worker has back into that work place, and also for other grass roots agencies,...show the skills that social work can contribute. (Robert)

A number of participants highlighted the professional growth they themselves received from providing off-site supervision to students. This was an opportunity to learn, keep active and maintain connection with the profession.

You are learning all the time. That's why I still enjoy supervision at 70, because you are always learning from the student ... it keeps your bloody mind active (Matthew)

When I took on my first student for external supervision ... I really wanted to maintain my connections with the profession. (Iona)

CHALLENGES

External supervisors highlighted not having visual observation in the agency of their own as challenging, and that this means that they have to rely on what the student and agency tell them. Supervisors needed to understand context and they engaged with others to gain this context (Zuchowski, 2013b).

Participants, however, also referred to the busyness of the task supervisors and the organisational structures as impacting on placement. Participants were concerned that there might not be a specific social work role in the agency or that the agency might not have an understanding of the broad base of social work, and that students might get two different opinions and potentially could play one supervisor off against the other. Participants thus talked about the importance of space for social work supervision and discussion with others.

A significant number of participants referred to the busyness of task supervisors in the agency and the hierarchy of the organisations impacting the field education experience. Three participants specifically pointed out that, in some agencies, the “wrong” people were appointed as task supervisors through default because of hierarchical structures, which then meant that:

...students have to manage senior people who do not have an understanding of social work...
(Georgina)

External supervisors' reference to the busyness of task supervisors in current work environments reflects Chinnery and Beddoe's (2011) observation that workload issues in a crisis-driven environment made it challenging for supervisors to be fully available to students in placement organisations. Thus, it appears the busyness of workplaces with social work supervisors has meant that more placements take place in organisations without social workers present, yet these workplaces are busy, too. The busyness of the supervisors in the agency highlighted for the external supervisors that the dedicated supervision time they themselves had with the students was really important.

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

Let's say they are a task supervisor and so the student is not getting the formal supervision, at least with an external then, there can be some accommodating of that, because you have the external meeting. Because that is usually ... defined each week, it is already locked. (Matthew)

A further challenge identified by participants was that students might get two different opinions and could get confused. Robert, for example, suggested that this might be especially difficult for first placement students who might want concrete information, but might get different information from the two supervisors. Other participants point to further consequences of differing messages. Bridget explains that,

Just to have that discussion and to know what perspective they are both coming from as well. Because I think if you are an external supervisor you could give ... some guidance to students, maybe about something they could be doing in the work place, but if you are not having a discussion with the task supervisor about the applicability of that, then it go[es] all pear shaped.

The concern of external supervisors is replicated in some of the experiences of students on placements with external supervision: at times they felt caught between differing expectations of supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013a). This highlights the importance of relationships and especially, effective triad relationships (Abram et al., 2000). Moreover, role clarification is important to ensure that students are not caught between supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013a) and collaboration and planning between supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013b) become essential.

Some participants also suggested private space between supervisors was important to ensure that they were not played off against each other. Shelly, for example, suggested that the task supervisor and the external supervisor needed private space to discuss the student's progress:

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

Relationships and Space

Research highlights the importance of relationships in supervision (Beddoe, 2000; Ornstein & Moses, 2010), and in regard to external supervision, the importance of triad relationships (Abram et al., 2000). Participants talked about the importance of building relationships and often saw themselves as the initiator or builder of the relationships with others involved in the placement. In the interviews, participants were specifically asked about four-way relationships. However, very few participants referred to these relationships between students, task supervisors, field educators and liaison people; rather, most explored their individual relationships with other parties, and these were seen as important for the placement. Karen stresses the importance of these relationships:

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

Participants highlighted the importance of building the relationships with students, building rapport, getting to know them, connecting early and ensuring that students felt that they could work together. Matthew, for instance, commented:

So I always [make] contact first off and I just say hi and [who] I am, you know, it would be good and meet, to have a chat, to get to know each other, that is the type of thing I normally do.

Meetings between various parties were seen as important to build relationships and served to clarify issues, roles, and the purpose of placement and monitor the student's progress. Participants particularly highlighted the importance of good communication between the external supervisor and the task supervisor.

I think it strengthened it [the meeting] and our supervision had gone quite ok and I think just when we put everything on the table, the student felt more at ease and she was more able to engage with other things and felt more supported when the task supervisor had more things clarified and we all had met together. (Karen)

A number of participants stressed the importance of private space and communication between both supervisors. This was seen as an important framework for working out a team approach to work with the student, developing their learning. This is highlighted by Shelly:

I think both, there needs to be the opportunity for a private...space to kind of form a team approach ... and then involve the student and have those honest or robust discussions... or difficult discussions if they are necessary, but I think if you don't provide that private space I have seen it happen that the student plays one against the other ... if they have had the opportunity to actually work more as a team, that wouldn't have happened.

Supervision and growth

The educational function of supervision was foregrounded in the participants' reflections on providing external supervision in field education. A few related also to the supportive and administrative functions of supervision (Kadushin, 1992), such as providing support, space to reflect and encouraging the student to do self-care, or providing the student with

specific tasks in supervision sessions. However, participants more extensively described the supervision they provided about offering the social work component of placement, providing a social work framework, and promoting the student's professional growth within the discipline. External supervisors thus pick up mainly one part of the role of field educators, who, in the general setting, are advised to ideally present students with the educational, administrative and supportive roles of supervision in placements (Cleak & Wilson, 2013).

Participants described various supervision processes to achieve these aims, including teaching or coaching students, facilitating space and opportunities for critical reflection, and providing feedback from a social work perspective. The supervisor's educational role was described in terms of teaching, training, coaching and exploring trees of knowledge and translating what students have learnt in classroom-taught theory to practice. The majority of participants highlighted that supervision is about promoting students' growth within the discipline. Ralph, for example, summarises his role in supervision as:

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

Participants emphasised that the supervision they provided was focused on assisting students to progress their practice frameworks and develop into effective practitioners.

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

What you are attempting to do is to give, you want that person to develop as bold professionally and personally, so that as they can be [an] effective practitioner. (Matthew)

The majority of participants discussed that they were providing the social work component to the placement. Participants outlined supervision relating to social work theory, skills, values and perspectives. Participants pointed to using critical reflection in supervision. A few participants highlighted the importance of the student getting feedback from them as social workers to allow students explore to the social work contribution to practice. This might be particularly important in current practice contexts where the de-professionalisation of the sections of the field (Healy, 2004), and other neoliberal interests threaten meaningful social work identities (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Maria, in discussing her supervision, for example, explains,

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

A number of participants referred to the importance of dividing up supervisory roles and thus the importance of meeting up with the task supervisor, and two of the participants outlined that were doing joint supervision with the student and the task supervisor. Most participants stressed the importance of clarifying expectations, responsibilities and roles (see also Zuchowski, 2013b). This clarity was seen as contributing to ideal placements.

The external supervisors' description of their role corresponded with their discussion of supervision. Participants described the role of the external supervisors as adding to what happened on placement, guiding students' learning, social work framework development, modelling the importance of supervision, supporting students and assessment. A number suggested a role that oversaw the overall placement to some extent:

You take on an external supervision role, ... you have got to be reasonable sure that you can maintain adequate knowledge about what is going on in the placement as it progresses, so, it's that setting up the mechanisms between the agency and yourself to ensure that if, either if there is any concerns or issues, but also if there is other things that they want to communicate to you that ... you are readily available and all of that, and for the student as well. (Maria)

Very few comments were made about the role of the task supervisor. Those comments listed allocation of tasks, participation in assessment, allowing for observation of practice and transferring organisational knowledge. Yet, a number of participants suggested that the task supervisors' contributions needed to be recognised. Tanya, for example, commented:

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

Participants acknowledged and recognised the contributions of task supervisors. They highlighted the importance of creating space and time to sort out the contribution of everyone and to dovetail responses, but also highlighted that their contribution needed to focus on the development of professional social work practice as this was not something that was provided by the task supervisor or potentially even by the agency setting. Social work roles have not always existed, thus they needed to engage with students in supervision through critical reflection about the social work component, reflecting the expectations of the AASW of external social work supervisors, providing "...the professional formation and supervision..." (AASW, 2012a, p. 7). This could be challenging as they needed an understanding of the context of the placement, the student and the task supervisor (Zuchowski, 2013b) and the time and space to connect and build relationships.

DISCUSSION

External supervisors, in highlighting the opportunities and challenges of external supervision, focused on the importance of supervision and the time they could dedicate to the student's learning that a busy task supervisor, potentially in an agency with little

understanding of the social work role, could provide. They highlighted the importance of separate time and space for supervision reflecting beneficial aspects of external supervision identified in graduate social work supervision, Beddoe (2012), for example, pointing out that external supervision allowed a focus on the clinical rather than the organizational aspect of work and McAuliffe and Sudbery (2005) indicating that social workers opened up more in external supervision settings. The separate space social work supervisors external to the agency have with students seems to be a valuable opportunity to focus on the students' professional formation and growth. Social work identity can be hard to maintain in current workplace contexts (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Thus, when we have an apprenticeship model concept for field education (Camilleri, 2001), we need to consider the agency culture, values and direction for the students' socialisation into the profession. We cannot always be assured that students are immersed in social work values, ethics and practice standards in placements with internal supervision (Barton et al., 2005) when students find it hard to access supervision, and workplaces are impacted by neoliberal thinking (Chenoweth, 2012). Are students socialised into the organisation or the profession? Can both be achieved concurrently so that social work students at the point of graduation have a "demonstrated sense of identity as a professional social worker" and have attained the required social work attributes (AASW, 2012b, p. 7)? Social workers providing student supervision from outside these practice contexts are clearly focused on building up a strong social work identity and framework, their off-site role might, in fact, facilitate more authentic discussions, as the interest and agenda of the organisation are not distracting from the focus of student development and learning (Hughes, 1998) in this space.

The challenges of placement with external supervision include the danger of students receiving two different messages from the supervisors (Zuchowski, 2013a) or students playing the supervisors off against one another. The supervisory relationships thus are more complex in field education with external supervision, and an effective triadic relationship is required (Abram et al., 2000). This triad could replicate Ornstein and Moses' framework for supervision, implementing a relational approach that "... is defined by mutuality, shared and authorised power, and the co-construction of knowledge" (Ornstein & Moses, 2010, p. 103). This needs space, time and a commitment for transparency and working together. Participants highlighted the importance of building relationships, especially with the task supervisors, to clarify roles, share information and communicate effectively. These relationships, however, were not described as triads, but relationships between individual stakeholders. To improve practice in this area, more information, assistance, time and space need to be available to supervisors and students to work in triads. Some participants suggested that some meetings with the task supervisors needed to be just between those two parties. Interestingly, this then opens up another space, a space where supervisors can discuss the student's progress without the student present. Again, it would be valuable to explore this in the triad, and how what is discussed is shared transparently and respectfully with the student to strengthen and add value to the learning experience, rather than adding to sense of powerlessness that many students experience in field education (Gair & Thomas, 2008).

In light of the busyness of task supervisors, the dedicated time available for the external supervisor to focus on professional development may provide a valuable model in times

when agencies are under strain and supervisors are time-restricted and may indeed not get work-load relief for taking students on placement (Healy, 2004; Moriarty et al., 2009). In proposing this as a model, though, we need to consider that there is still a cost (Henderson, 2010). What this model does, is to shift the responsibility from overworked organisations and staff who, in Australia, do not get reimbursed for the time they spend guiding, supporting and teaching students, to off-site supervisors who generally get paid for this. While a relatively small payment, it is still a cost that is currently carried by universities under pressure to provide educational opportunities to students. This can potentially further marginalise field education in academia, reinforcing the concern that field education is resource intensive (Morley & Dunstan, 2013).

CONCLUSION

External field educators shared a clear focus on providing off-site supervision for social work students that concentrated on the students' professional growth in the profession, thus meeting what is expected of social work supervision in field education (AASW, 2012a). Space and time are highlighted as important aspects for professional growth, so when two different supervisors are involved in field education, getting two different opinions is facilitated as getting different, but not competing, opinions. Time and space also need to be available to explore boundaries, roles, relationships and communication. Further discussion, planning and guidance are necessary to create and support effective triad and/or four-way relationships.

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