Listening to student experiences of supervision

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Abstract

This article presents the findings from a qualitative study which explored student perceptions of their fieldwork supervision experiences and the relevance of this to key stakeholders in fieldwork. Participants perceived their supervision experiences were due to their understanding of the purpose and process of supervision; their assertiveness; supervisor experience and skill; the relationship and perceived compatibility between supervisee and supervisor, and luck. The implications identified from this study include the preparation of key stakeholders in fieldwork and the pivotal role and responsibility held by fieldwork coordinators in schools of social work.

Introduction

Fieldwork is an experiential form of learning, '… where students develop their professional selves and integrate their knowledge and skills under the supervision of expert practitioners' (Noble, 2011, p. 3). As the 'signature pedagogy' of social work education (Council on Social Work Education, 2008; Shulman, 2008; Shulman & Safyer, 2005; Wayne, Bogo, & Raskin, 2010), fieldwork is an essential method for socialising students to the role of practitioner (Wayne, et al., 2010) and vital for the consolidation of theory and practice. It is through fieldwork that learning opportunities not possible through any other educational mechanism are made possible to students.

Fieldwork supervision is distinct from staff supervision, because it has a particular focus on the educative function of supervision. It can be defined as the oversight of a student on practicum by a more experienced, qualified practitioner who holds the responsibility to:

> … guide the student through the placement … providing a measure of support and advocacy, facilitating learning opportunities that address student learning needs, evaluating practice development, and assessing work performance (Maidment, 2001, p. 284).

A distinction is made in this article between the terms fieldwork educator and external supervisor. The term 'fieldwork educator' is used to refer to the staff member in the fieldwork

practicum agency who 'facilitates the student's learning in practice settings' (Doel, 2010, p. 7), whereas 'external supervisor' refers to the supervisor located outside the fieldwork practicum agency who is either employed elsewhere or self-employed (Morrell, 2001). Where the issue being discussed concerns both these persons, the term 'fieldwork supervisor' is used. The term 'fieldwork coordinator' refers to the person employed by the student's training provider to oversee the placement of students in a fieldwork agency.

The issue of the quality of fieldwork supervision is of particular importance given that experiences students encounter in the formative stages of their professional development have been shown to be extremely influential in shaping their professional practice (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Giddings, Vodde, & Cleveland, 2004). Similarly, practices modelled to students can be reproduced by them not only once they become qualified, but when students themselves later become supervisors (Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Morrison, 2005; Munson, 2001).

Whilst it is recognised that there are issues of supply and demand with fieldwork in Aotearoa New Zealand, as there is with delivery models of fieldwork education, these issues fall outside the scope of this article which explores students' experiences of supervision.

Before discussing the research, it is useful to highlight what the phenomenon of fieldwork supervision is in practice. The following section explores the phenomenon of fieldwork supervision through the literature.

Fieldwork supervision

Fieldwork education originated in an apprenticeship model located in the field, with an eventual move to formalised fieldwork education within tertiary training institutes (Bogo & McKnight, 2005; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002). While fieldwork education has changed form over time, it remains clearly located in social work education. As is evident in the plurality of supervision forms in staff supervision (O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2011) so is there a diversity of forms of fieldwork supervision (i.e. one-to-one, group, peer, cultural, managerial, clinical and co-supervision). The practice of fieldwork supervision reiterates the place of learning theory in fieldwork supervision, and literature highlights the importance of preparation, the place of relationship and concepts of 'good' fieldwork supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Davys, 2002; Gelman, 2004; Morrison, 2008).

The role of teaching and learning, the importance of preparedness, and the role of relationship are all significant themes identified in the literature as contributing to the quality of fieldwork supervision. The importance of each of these is explored in turn.

Teaching and learning in fieldwork supervision
The importance of teaching and learning in fieldwork supervision has been a consistent theme in the literature. Virginia Robinson, a key figure in early social work education in America, highlighted the educative function of supervision by suggesting that supervision needed to be seen, '… as a unique teaching process which has grown up inside of casework, indigenous to it, but different in important ways … a distinct and unique educational process' (Robinson, 1978, p. 195).

In highlighting the opportunity fieldwork provides to link classroom learning with experience, George describes fieldwork supervision as, '… *an indispensable method of teach-*

ing, when knowing, understanding and doing are seen as steps in the learning process' [emphasis added] (1982, p. 55). Kadushin (1991) noted that the fieldwork supervisor often needs to be not only a skilful practitioner, but also a skilled teacher. Much of the literature discussing the importance of teaching and learning in fieldwork relates to the wider context of fieldwork rather than to fieldwork supervision. Maidment's (2000a) research revealed that although fieldwork supervisors were generally unable to articulate the pedagogical methods they used in the supervision of students, several frameworks for learning were evident in their practice.

The significance of fieldwork supervision as an educative tool corresponds with learning theory (Kolb, 1984) which has been highly influential in understanding how people learn. Learning theory was foundational to the development of Bogo and Vayda's (1991) Integration of Theory and Practice Loop, which provides a useful framework for fieldwork supervisors assisting students to integrate theory and practice (Boisen & Syers, 2004; Homonoff, 2008; Maidment, 2001).

Inherent in the literature are the notions of reflective practice and critical thinking, as they are considered to be key tenets of educating social work practitioners (Noble, 2011; Noble & Henrickson, 2011). One example of this is Davys and Beddoe's Reflective Learning Model (2009) which incorporates Schon's (1987) notions of reflective practice. Davys and Beddoe emphasise that, '… supervision is a forum for learning and… the main vehicle for learning is reflection' (Davys & Beddoe, 2009, p. 920). Another study found that 'disturbing events' prompted students to make meaning of the experience, thereby eliciting the learning from the experience and in doing so reinforcing the importance of reflective learning (Lam, Wong, & Leung, 2007).

The importance of preparedness for fieldwork supervision

The importance of quality supervision for students as well as a greater degree of preparation for students embarking on fieldwork has been noted in the literature (Gelman, 2004) as have the benefits of preparing supervisees and outlining realistic expectations of them (Barretta-Herman, 2001; Morrell, 2005; Morrison, 2008; Munson, 1989). This has been further confirmed by studies considering the impact of preparation of students for fieldwork (Gelman, 2004; Rosenthal Gelman & Lloyd, 2008; Wilson, Walsh, & Kirby, 2008) which demonstrated a correlation between preparation and reduced anxiety (and therefore increased learning) experienced by students.

Over the past 10 years the number of resources available for preparing and supporting students as they venture out on fieldwork has grown markedly (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2011; Cleak & Wilson, 2007; Doel, 2010; Grobman, 2002; Parker, 2004; Thomlison & Corcoran, 2008), including guidance on the kinds of issues that can be taken to supervision (Bond & Holland, 1998), realistic expectations of fieldwork supervisors (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger, 2011) and encouragement for supervisees to be active participants rather than being merely receptive vessels (Davys, 2007).

It follows with regards to preparation for fieldwork supervision that preparation of the fieldwork supervisor is also of interest. Citing a number of studies, Detlaff (2003, p. iv) emphasised that the transition from practitioner to fieldwork supervisor is not merely a process of professional maturation and stated that 'research indicates that social work practitioners

need specific training to be effective as field instructors'. Similarly, Maidment (2001) notes the formulation of strategies to boost field educators' professional development is essential to offering quality practicum learning. Preparation of fieldwork educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, was confirmed in Hay, O'Donoghue and Blagdon's (2006) research which revealed 'a lack of training for field educators' (p.27) as one of the reasons that fieldwork supervisors and students reported that fieldwork aims were not met.

While there has been some discussion in the literature about whether the need for preparation of fieldwork supervisors might indicate the need to develop a system of accreditation or national standards for fieldwork supervisors (Beddoe, 1997; Walsh-Tapiata & Ellis, 1994), this has not as yet eventuated. The need to extend fieldwork educators' professional development for oversight of social work students was recognised by a network of educators from training providers across the country, and resulted in the resource Kia Tene/Off the Cuff (Douglas, 2011). Targeted at fieldwork educators and available free via the internet, this package provides a number of activities for fieldwork educators to undertake with their fieldwork student/s.

The role of relationship in fieldwork supervision
The importance of the supervisory relationship is a key factor emphasised by numerous authors (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Davys & Beddoe, 2010; Fehmi, 2009; Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Kaiser, 2004; Lefevre, 2005) including Carroll (2001) who considers relationship as part of the 'spirituality' or 'being' of supervision. It has been said that:

> …the supervisory relationship is at the heart of fieldwork education. The field educator requires skills and personal attributes – warmth, genuineness, sensitivity, the ability to facilitate another's learning and the capacity to model good practice... (Beddoe, 2000, p. 41).

Falendar and Shafranske (2008) suggest that the supervisory relationship is one of three interconnected pillars upon which supervision is based, the other two pillars being 'inquiry, and educational praxis' (p.5). Similarly, research by Davys (2005) explored supervisees' perspectives on what constituted 'good' supervision and identified four factors, one of which was the nature of the supervision relationship, and another related factor, the opportunity to exercise choice as to whether to continue or discontinue the supervision relationship.

Despite the importance of considering difference in the supervision relationship, there is a lack of literature that exists in regard to ethnic and other differences between the student and supervisor or field educator. Only one study was located which explored this dynamic (Cooper and Maidment, 2001). This exploratory study based on three case studies confirmed that those in the position of least power (namely the student and the client) are most impacted by issues of difference not being addressed in supervision, the result of which is the continuation of oppression and subordination. The study consequently highlighted that supervision models need to address these issues.

In reviewing the literature, it is apparent that there is a very limited amount of research exploring students' perspectives of their fieldwork supervision experiences, and that research conducted has mostly focused on specific aspects of fieldwork supervision. There is limited research exploring what students perceive to be positive fieldwork experiences, and no research was located which explored students' understandings from a phenomenological approach. This review of the literature therefore clearly justified the need for research to consider a student perspective of fieldwork supervision.

Research methodology and design

The aim of the research was to examine the views of social work students regarding their fieldwork supervision experiences. In seeking to answer the main research question 'how do social work students perceive their fieldwork supervision experiences?', three auxiliary questions were explored. These three questions explored social work students' experiences of fieldwork supervision, their perceptions of positive fieldwork supervision and the understandings they formed about why they had, or did not have, positive fieldwork supervision experiences.

The study sought to understand the participants' experiences and the meanings they attached to these experiences, thus aligning with a qualitative research approach; and, more specifically, phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to understand what it is like to have a particular experience (Lee, 2002; van Manen, 1990). The particular experience focused upon was that of being a student participating in fieldwork supervision. The 'reality' of how the phenomenon (in this case fieldwork supervision) was experienced was therefore determined by participants (Kvale, 2007).

Participants were recruited through social work training providers in Aotearoa New Zealand. The recruitment process commenced with a phone call to the identified training providers and a request that they invite students to participate in the research. Pertinent paperwork was mailed to the three training providers who agreed to invite their students to participate in the project. This included an advertisement to be read to students who met the research criteria, and information to distribute to interested students. Students who expressed an interest in the research were given further information and invited to mail a return envelope with their details to the researcher.

The selection criterion was for social work students who had experienced supervision during the course of a fieldwork placement. The participants selected had experienced the phenomenon, were interested in exploring the nature and meanings of the phenomenon, and were willing to participate in a recorded interview as well as give permission for the data to be published.

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were used to gain understanding of participants' lived experiences of supervision, and have been used effectively in previous studies of supervision (Davys, 2005; Henderson, 2010; Tsui, 2008). Participant recruitment resulted in seven social work students participating in the research. These participants were spread across Aotearoa New Zealand, consequently the researcher and six participants agreed to conduct the research interview by video calls over the internet. One participant was able to travel to the researcher's workplace and that interview was conducted in person. All aspects of the research design were approved by a University Ethics Committee, and were consistent with cultural and professional ethical guidelines.

The research participants were aged from 20-30 years through to 50-60 years of age and all were in their final year of study. Their ethnicities included: three New Zealand Māori participants, two of whom were also of New Zealand European descent; two New Zealanders of European descent and two European participants. Five participants were female and two were male. Four participants were studying towards a Master of Applied Social Work

(MASW), and three were studying towards a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms have been used when referring to them.

Research findings

Interviews were transcribed and data was explicated to reveal the key factors of participants' fieldwork supervision experiences. The deliberate decision to avoid the phrase 'analysis' was made as analysis implies a philosophy contrary to that of phenomenology (Hycner, 1999, cited Groenewald, 2004), in that 'analysis' infers a breaking into parts. In contrast 'explication' infers an exploration or consideration of the various components of a phenomenon without losing sense of the whole (Hycner, 1999, cited Groenewald, 2004).

The data explication process comprised of three stages. In the first stage the interviews were transcribed, identifying information coded, and data was explicated by a close reading of the narratives. This close reading involved clustering the participants' responses under the main research questions and identifying patterns in the text, which were colour coded. In the next phase, the themes identified from the patterns were checked and sorted into main themes and sub-themes, while the final stage involved a further clustering of the themes extracted and a check that these were common to the majority, if not all of the interviews. This final stage also required identifying any individual variations within the themes. From this process the five groupings reported below emerged.

The participants' narratives revealed five main understandings they formed about why their fieldwork supervision experiences transpired as they did:

- The understanding of the purpose and process of supervision that participants, and in some instances their supervisor, possessed
- Their assertiveness to insist on their supervision needs being met
- Their supervisor's experience and skill, in practice and in fieldwork supervision
- The relationship and perceived compatibility between them and their supervisor
- Luck

Each of these factors is briefly reviewed below.

Understanding the purpose and process of supervision

Key to shaping their fieldwork supervision experience was the understanding that participants and in some instances their supervisor, possessed about the purpose and process of supervision. Several participants spoke about their initial lack of knowledge about what supervision was or how to use it. Nina, for example, recalled, 'I didn't really have a really good understanding of what supervision was before I started my first placement'. This uncertainty was echoed by Heeni, who stated,

> I didn't really have a strong grasp of what supervision was and how best to use that relationship… it was frustrating because I didn't understand what it was that [my supervisor] wanted from me. And in the same instance I didn't understand… I didn't know what I wanted as well.

This lack of understanding was commented on by participants also in relation to other students and colleagues on placement who also appeared to not understand the purpose of supervision.

Nearly all of the participants spoke about having received some teaching about fieldwork supervision prior to going out on placement, but they all mentioned that only a very short time was allocated to this teaching. Two participants were unable to recall any teaching on supervision, but assumed they must have received it given the importance they perceived supervision has to practice. Heeni reflected that given her class had not commenced practicum at the time they received the information on supervision, that it was hard to comprehend, and the lack of experience meant the information was abstract and theoretical rather than grounded in practice understanding. It was not until Heeni experienced supervision that she began to understand more clearly the concept of supervision and its application.

A comment made by Nina highlighted a point made by several participants regarding their initial inability to anchor supervision to anything familiar to them:

> I guess initially with the first placement it was just – 'what is this supervision?' and you know 'what's it for?' and 'what are we actually supposed to be doing here?' And that took a while for me to kind of get the hang of it … never having experienced that kind of supervision before … initially it was a bit challenging, the … learning part.

This factor reinforces the need for preparation of both supervisee and supervisor, and the importance of experientially-based learning about supervision. While participants talked about building on their unsatisfactory fieldwork supervision experiences and over time forming an understanding of the purpose of supervision and how they could best use it, Nina emphasised the role of the training providers in better preparing students to use supervision.

> I think [the training provider] could maybe spend a little more time preparing people for supervision. I don't know whether it was just me, whether I was just asleep that day or something, but I didn't feel like I was that prepared.

Nina's comment captures the essence of many of the participants' feelings about their readiness for supervision.

Participant assertiveness
The lack of understanding about supervision meant that participants initially had no standard against which to measure their experience to know whether what happened for them was typical or acceptable. This left students feeling unable to challenge what many of them felt was unsatisfactory supervision. Despite being generally aware of the principles of conflict resolution, the majority of participants were unclear whether or not there was any formal process in place to enable them to question their supervisor or their supervisor's skill in fieldwork supervision.

Whether a lack of assertiveness reflected a lack of understanding about the shared responsibility for supervision or simply a level of professional maturity, was unclear. Participants' stories revealed that their assertiveness to raise unmet supervision needs grew over time, as was evidenced in successive practicums.

Many participants thought that their uncertainty about what to expect of supervision contributed to them not getting what they otherwise would have received – that knowing what to expect, they could then hold their supervisors to account. This notion was illustrated by Heeni:

It grew better over time as I kind of gained an understanding of supervision and how I could best utilise it and how my field educator liked to run supervision and stuff … It's just there was potential for me to learn so much more and I kind of regret that … a) I didn't take charge of the sessions more, and b) I didn't have a very good grasp of what supervision was and what I wanted from it, so there was a lot of potential for it to get better.

Many participants developed the belief that they needed to actively seek supervision rather than rely on their supervisor to initiate meetings. Their narratives suggested that once they realised this, and were confident to pursue their expectations, this made a significant difference to the outcome of supervision. This belief and corresponding action by participants indicates a level of ownership that participants adopted for knowing about and insisting on the fundamentals of supervision.

Supervisor experience and skill

The experience and skill level of the fieldwork supervisor (specifically those who were perceived to be less skilled) was another factor seen by participants to contribute to their supervision encounters. Rangimarie questioned the training of one of her supervisors as she believed this had a significant impact on her supervision experience. She believed that her internal supervisor simply did not have the tools to guide her reflective practice and evidenced little skill in maintaining confidentiality or working effectively in the practice area. In contrast, a supervisor's skill in being able to question students in a way that they experienced as challenging yet supportive was valued. Participants all sought to be challenged in supervision as they saw this as a helpful part of the learning process.

In relation to supervisor skill, Nina queried whether the baseline expectations held by training providers for fieldwork supervisor's experience was adequate:

[The training provider]'s only expectation of the supervisor is that they are a qualified social worker and they've had two years of practice, which isn't a lot really… I think you will learn more from having a more experienced supervisor, and …that's something that [training provider] should … think about a bit more.

This corresponds with the point made earlier regarding the possibility of establishing an accreditation system for fieldwork supervisors. It should be noted too, that current requirements for fieldwork supervision established by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) are that 'All placements must have supervision provided by fully registered social workers' and that 'At least one placement will be supervised on site by a fully registered social worker.' (Social Workers Registration Board, 2013, 5.2 and 5.3). These requirements therefore do not stipulate the minimum length of practice experience a supervisor must have as suggested by Nina.

Nina acknowledged that insisting that fieldwork supervisors have more experience to qualify for the role may result in a reduction of the number of either fieldwork placements or supervisors, and this may be why the current requirements exist. She talked about the value of external supervisors, suggesting they are more professional and more challenging than internal supervisors because of the distance between them and the supervisee and because the external supervisor does not supervise the student's work on a day-to-day basis.

Another interesting understanding that participants formed about their supervision experiences was the skill of responsiveness of the supervisors. Rona stated that for her the

informality of the supervision process gave her the freedom 'to walk in and say this is what I need to talk about today.' A related aspect concerned the flexibility of the supervision setting which participants said contributed to the supervision atmosphere, either positively or negatively. Heeni, for example, noted the impact of feeling unrestricted when taking supervision outside of the workplace:

> … it's nice to be out of the working environment and it's easier for me to disconnect with… the fact that I'm within the organisation I should hold my tongue. I'm in another space … a whole new level of free. Free and open.

In part this flexibility in meeting style and venue reflects relational skills, but also suggests the need for students to make links with their learning in ways appropriate to their preferred learning styles (Cartney, 2000; Honey & Mumford, 1992). This signals the importance of a supervisor's skill in supervising in a manner tailored according to an individual student's learning needs.

Relationship and compatibility

The supervisory relationship was seen as a key reason that fieldwork supervision was experienced by participants as positive or not, and in many instances viewed by participants as being hugely influenced by 'compatibility'. This was referred to in relation to a variety of characteristics, from sharing similar communication styles to practice perspectives, and worldviews. Participants varied in their explanations as to why they experienced positive supervision relationships. Rangimarie described two of her supervisors as, '… very strong and very relaxed and … easy to talk to'. She attributed this to knowing those particular supervisors previously and having a shared Māori worldview. Lachlan similarly described his supervisors as, '… really friendly people that were good listeners and … were good at engagement.'

Jordan made an observation that his supervisory relationships were different from each other. He attributed this to, '… the length of the relationship from … starting work and also in the formality of the contracts.' Jordan discovered that as he increased self-disclosure over time, he experienced more understanding and support from his supervisors, which in turn strengthened the supervision relationship. He commented, '… the more open I am the more likely I am to benefit from supervision … hiding stuff just takes a heap of energy and doesn't assist.'

For some participants there was a connection between a positive supervision relationship and the sharing of power. In one of his practicums, Jordan was supervised by someone new to the supervisor role who he felt shared power equitably. He stated: 'The fact that we were learning roles together meant it was a less hierarchical relationship, it was a much more even relationship, I think I'm much more comfortable with that.'

For Heeni, the power dynamic in supervision was related to cultural authority. She believed that her first supervision relationship was poor not only due to unclear expectations and understandings of supervision, but also to a cultural dynamic:

> I'll be honest and say she intimidated me at first, just because she presents herself as … mana wahine, so like quite firm, quite intelligent, very strong tangata whenua base and that kind of intimidated me a little bit because my identity as being a Māori clinician, or just Māori in general was nowhere near as defined or pronounced as hers was.

In exploring this issue further, Heeni acknowledged that she was aware of coming from iwi outside of that area whereas her supervisor was tangata whenua. For her, this reinforced that she did not have the mana to challenge the situation with her supervisor.

Another element of relationship which some participants attributed to their supervision experience was the impact of pre-existing relationships. Some participants knew their fieldwork supervisors on a personal level prior to fieldwork, and others knew them through professional connections. Being supervised by someone whom participants knew prior to fieldwork was mostly seen to provide significant advantage in the fieldwork supervision experience. The ability to get on and do the work of reflexive practice, rather than spending time becoming familiar with each other was seen by participants to be hugely beneficial.

Relationship is resoundingly emphasised as vital to positive supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Davys, 2007; Scaife, 2001) although there are differing ideas about the extent to which matching supervisees and supervisors contributes to a positive relationship, and if so what might be desirable areas of compatibility (Caspi & Reid, 2002; Davys & Beddoe, 2010). There were numerous comments made by the participants suggesting that this was indeed a key ingredient to a successful match, and therefore to positive supervision.

Luck

Luck was the other significant factor identified by participants as shaping their fieldwork supervision experiences. Participants perceived a level of inevitability to their experience, intimating that such experiences were likely at some point in their professional lifespan and they had the fortune or misfortune of experiencing positive or poor supervision at this particular point in their supervision history. These comments suggest that some participants believed that the success of their fieldwork supervision experiences was not a result of careful matching or reflective of the quality of the training provider's pool of fieldwork supervisors, but due to chance. Perceiving luck as a contributing factor to shaping their supervision experiences suggests that participants had a lack of understanding of the requirements of fieldwork supervisors and of the processes followed in appointing and allocating fieldwork supervisors.

Interestingly the role that luck played in students being allocated a good placement was also raised in Maidment's (2000b) research. Her participants' references to luck implied that they did not understand allocation as a managed process overseen by quality control measures, rather that they perceived it as a random occurrence, with them in a position of powerlessness (Maidment, 2000b). Given the changes to suitability requirements for fieldwork supervisors implemented since Maidment's research was undertaken, particularly since the establishment of the SWRB in 2003, it is noteworthy that 'luck' re-presents as a theme in the current study. This factor raises questions about whether the perception that luck played a role in the success or otherwise of participants' fieldwork supervision experiences could be linked to participants' reluctance to challenge unsatisfactory supervision. In other words, participants perhaps considered having unsatisfactory supervision was just the luck of the draw, and hopefully they would have 'better luck' next time, so did not see the need to challenge poor supervision.

Implications

The participants' experiences of fieldwork supervision have implications for all stakeholders involved in fieldwork education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Six key implications are identified from this study. The first implication relates to the transferability of the findings to other students, three relate to preparation of key stakeholders in fieldwork, the fifth concerns access to and provision of cultural supervision and Kaupapa Māori supervision, and the final implication relates to the responsibility of fieldwork coordinators in overseeing many aspects of the previous implications. Implications two to six are overviewed in the following section.

Implications for students

One implication arising from this study is that social work students must be adequately prepared for fieldwork supervision. Participants' experiences demonstrated that student preparation for fieldwork supervision needs to be more robust than it currently appears to be. Participants lacked knowledge of what they could expect from both fieldwork supervision and their supervisors, which contributed to them feeling unable to assert themselves in insisting on the fundamentals of supervision.

While there is some literature which supports the development and delivery of the key curriculum areas for preparation of students for fieldwork (Williamson, Hostetter, Byers, & Huggins, 2010) this study suggests that this is an area for further research. Preparation of students for fieldwork supervision needs to include information on the purpose and process of supervision with an emphasis on the learning focus in fieldwork supervision. Preparation also needs to provide students with the skills to measure 'positive' supervision, and how to identify and respond to power in supervision. How to negotiate a supervision contract that will touch on many of those things, including how to respond to unsatisfactory supervision (Doel & Shardlow, 2005) is another area this study has shown to be necessary for student preparation.

Implications for fieldwork educators

Fieldwork educators (that is, agency-based supervisors of students) also require adequate skill and preparation for the role of supervisor (Dettlaff, 2003; Hay, O'Donoghue, & Blagdon, 2006; Williamson, et al., 2010) rather than it being assumed that this occurs through a process of professional maturation. The importance of impressing on fieldwork educators their responsibility to assist student learning cannot be overstated. Understanding the significance of the learning element to fieldwork supervision and ensuring fieldwork educators can facilitate student learning is an essential component of their preparation for fieldwork supervision (Giddings, et al., 2004). It is important to ensure that fieldwork educators are aware of kia tene/off the cuff (Douglas, 2011) so they can access its resources and activities to guide student learning.

Given the importance of the fieldwork educator role, a revisiting of the requirements for fieldwork supervisors appears warranted. While SWRB policies dictate that social work students must be supervised by a registered social worker (Social Workers Registration Board, 2013), apart from an obligation to practise within the scope of their competency there is no requirement that the registered social work supervisor is an experienced or trained supervisor. Standard Seven of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers'

Supervisor Practice Standards (Supervisors' Interest Group, 2004) concerns the supervisor's knowledge of 'social work and supervision methods' although it is unclear how this is monitored particularly given that the process of review for supervisor competency against supervisor (rather than social worker) standards is optional.

It is acknowledged that a consequence of clarifying and potentially narrowing the eligibility criteria for fieldwork supervisors could be a reduction in the pool of prospective supervisors, thus limiting the range of fieldwork agencies available to students. O'Donoghue (2010) proposes the implementation of a developmental framework for supervisors and supervisees which would go some way towards addressing this concern.

Fieldwork educators need to understand: the purpose and process of supervision, including the essentials of positive supervision; the importance of relationship and of experiencing positive supervision and of students forming a positive mental pattern of supervision (Hanna, 2007); how to appropriately manage power (Davys, 2005); giving and receiving feedback (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) and; having expectations of supervisees appropriate to their level of professional development (Stoltenberg, 2005). Skills in developing and maintaining relationship in supervision have also been shown to be vital and highly valued by participants in this study, so may need to be revisited in preparation developed for fieldwork educators. The importance of supervisors gaining a supervision history from new supervisees and explicitly contracting around issues mentioned above such as managing power, and addressing conflict also need to be emphasised in fieldwork supervisor training.

Implications for external supervisors
Another key implication is that, like fieldwork educators, external supervisors must be experienced and skilled in fieldwork supervision in order to take on this role. This may require the development of explicit criteria for fieldwork supervisors. Many of the professional development needs identified as vital for fieldwork educators are similarly required by external supervisors so are not repeated here.

Implications for cultural and Kaupapa Maori supervision
This implication concerns the need to devise a plan to meet the cultural and Kaupapa Māori supervision needs of students. This study showed that consideration of how cultural and Kaupapa Māori supervision is positioned and how this aligns or not with obligations and accountabilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and social work practice standards in fieldwork, requires immediate attention. A plan detailing training providers' responses as to who has access to these forms of supervision, under what circumstances and how these forms of supervision will be resourced (including resourcing of appropriate personnel) is required to ensure the genuine provision of these forms of supervision.

The varied access that participants had to cultural and Kaupapa Māori supervision highlights that further thought is required and guidelines need to be established regarding how cultural supervision is positioned in relation to other forms of supervision, as well as what the training providers' response is to this. While financial resourcing is a consideration, the same could be said of all fieldwork supervision, and any decision made regarding resourcing to some extent reflects the position that form of supervision holds within the tertiary institution.

Implications for fieldwork coordinators

There is a demonstrated need to review the preparation of students for fieldwork supervision, in terms of what is taught, when and how. Reviewing the learning outcomes of fieldwork preparation is warranted as is consideration of development of a progression of expectations of students in supervision. Preparation needs to be firmly based on principles of adult learning theory with a greater use of experiential learning, and on-going supported learning particularly at the commencement of practicum.

Fieldwork coordinators need to consider how they might ensure the adequate preparation of fieldwork educators and external supervisors, particularly emphasising the teaching role held by fieldwork supervisors and advocating for a certain level of experience and skill in supervision. This may involve the implementation of a developmental framework for fieldwork supervisors and a clearer process of accreditation for those involved in supervising students during fieldwork.

Another important implication for fieldwork coordinators is the need to review how their training programme positions cultural and Kaupapa Māori supervision and how they are resourced in their particular social work programme.

Limitations of the study

As this article is based on the findings of data from interviews with seven social work students, it is dependent on the credibility of 'the participants, their recollections and the interpretation of participants' responses by the researcher' (O'Donoghue, 2012, p. 228). The findings have raised numerous questions about the meaning to key stakeholders involved in fieldwork supervision. The extent to which these findings are transferable depends on the extent to which others involved in fieldwork supervision share these experiences (Fook, 2002) as well as the dependability of the processes by which the data was explicated (Bryman, 2004).

Given these limitations, and the extent to which the experiences of the participants are shared with others in fieldwork supervision, several areas of fieldwork supervision emerge which warrant further investigation. Four key areas for further research are: preparation of students for fieldwork supervision; expectations of students in fieldwork supervision; use of external supervisors in Aotearoa New Zealand; and the current and ideal provision of cultural and Kaupapa Māori supervision.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the key findings and implications of research on student perceptions of fieldwork supervision experiences. It has highlighted the centrality of fieldwork supervision to social work education, and the importance of social work students experiencing positive supervision in fieldwork. The implications raised by this study strongly suggest that in order to increase the prospect of this occurring, the preparation of those involved in fieldwork supervision requires further development, in particular by fieldwork coordinators, and that the positioning and resourcing of cultural supervision and Kaupapa Māori supervision requires immediate consideration and action. In conclusion, this article has highlighted the importance of listening to students' experiences of supervision and having the imagination to envision, understand and respond to their learning and development.

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