

in a residential setting. Despite some reservations and initial reluctance, the findings proved that the learning from this placement was immense, not only for the students but also for the agencies within which they were placed (who were disappointed if they were not allocated a student!)(Ward et al, 2005).

What is of significance is the timing of this project...it was developed nine years ago, and ran for five years. However, with contributions from a current social work student, our paper will explore the validity of re-examining the experiments of the past, and will demonstrate the importance of developing social work skills (Trevithick, 2012) and how the learning from this project could be harnessed to meet the needs of the social work students and service users of today, especially as part of the thirty days skill set.

Room: 1.04

First floor

Someone to watch over me?
Challenges & opportunities
of having social work practice
observed

P

Roma Thomas, Charlotte Whittaker

While observation is fundamental to social work education and practice, research has traditionally focused solely on the social worker as Observer. The implications of having one's practice observed is an area which is much less examined. Given the increased focus on developing evidence based practice; and the fact that from April 2013, the Ofsted inspection regime will include direct observation as part of its emphasis on the

qualitative experience of social work intervention, direct observation of practice is an area of research which warrants greater attention.

Many professionals whose interventions involve observation of family life might themselves be resistant to the idea of observation. This poses challenges both for child service practitioners and for the cause of research to develop practice. It poses questions as to how social workers can come to terms with observation since inevitably it forms a key component of research in developing more sources of evidence based practice.

This paper presents evidence from a study where observation of social worker family visits in Child Protection cases forms a key component of a large-scale Randomised Control Trial (RCT). The RCT focuses on social work practice and parental engagement. This presentation includes the reflections of social workers who have experienced having their practice observed and recorded. It considers tensions that exist between social worker and researcher in an observational research context. We consider the role of social worker as 'gate-keeper' in research with children and families and the role of the researcher in facilitating supportive working relationships. It also includes reflections from parents on the observation of practice.

This presentation seeks to highlight the positive contribution that observation can make to reflective practice and the challenge of ensuring that it does not become part of a tick box assessment process; to be endured rather than a key source of learning and development.

We will also consider what we can learn from other professions where observation is already an established part of practice development. This paper provides insight into understanding the subjective experience of being observed as a social work practitioner and how social workers can be supported with this experience.

Room: 1.04

First floor

The importance of context for
'external' social work supervisors in
social work practice learning

P

Ines Zuchowski

In social work education practice learning is recognised as central to the degree, facilitating the development of practice skills, professional identity and a professional practice framework. Social work practitioners, organisations and social work education are exposed to global, economic, social and political changes and workplace pressures that impact social work education and practice including the provision of student practice learning. Social Work practice learning with 'external' supervision is becoming more prevalent, but in some countries it is considered less desirable than practice learning with 'in house' supervision. The small body of literature on practice learning with external supervision through the use of practice assessors/

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external field educators explores the benefits and the complexities of these set-ups, but particularly emphasises the importance of establishing and maintaining the triad relationship of supervisor, on-site and off-site supervisor and the provision of continued support. Equally, literature on external supervision raises concerns about the visibility of students' work when the assessor is external to the organisation. Literature also suggests that students are more positive about practice learning where the social worker is on site. This presentation provides interim findings of my current Australian research exploring 'Social Work Student Placements with External Supervision'.

The aim of the research is to explore the experiences of key stakeholders in social work practice learning with external supervision and develop practice in this area. A qualitative approach guided in –depth interviews with Australian students, field educators/ practice assessors, task supervisors and university liaison persons. This presentation reports on the experiences of social workers who provide 'external' supervision and assessment in practice learning. The implications that can be drawn from the data for an International context are considered. A range of themes have emerged, including a focus on supervision, relationships, roles, placement preparation and assessment. Preliminary findings suggest that knowledge and understanding of context is dominant in social workers' reflections on their experience.

Room: 1.05

First floor

A symposium exploring new developments and applications in practice-near research

P

Stephen Briggs, Lynn Froggett, Helen Hingley-Jones, Mark Wheeler

Practice-near methods have a significant role in developing social work research that is congruent with practice. Characteristics are: gathering data that yields 'thick description' of the social; exploration of emotionality and relationships, including research participants' experiences; affording opportunities for transparent theorisation of practice through an interdisciplinary approach; making links with more 'practice distant' methods either within the same project or with knowledge generated by researching subjectivities in broader contexts.

This symposium will present recent developments in the application of practice-near methods. It will explore and theorise experiences of marginalised people and communities, whilst also illuminating the roles of professionals working with these communities. Three papers aim to demonstrate the vitality of practice-near research:

Paper 1 develops the idea of 'scenic understanding' as a method of apprehending wholeness in psychosocial research. Examples are presented in which associative thinking is used to access imagery embedded in a situation, interview or text and translate into a scenic composition. This makes

full use of the individual researcher's imaginative resources and ability to visualise, as well as resources held in common with a wider cultural field. The objective is to understand and communicate both the 'feeling' and the symbolic content of a scene, in an effort to apprehend the nature and content of the practitioner's and research subject's experience.

Paper 2 suggests that there are opportunities for inclusive approaches to mental health research contrasting traditional more 'practice distant' approaches. It explores the generation of 'first person' knowledge in narratives of African-Caribbean men using biographical methods to generate subjective accounts of how participants make sense of, and reconcile the disturbances of self that often accompany psychosis.

Paper 3 explores the role of observational methods applying the Tavistock model of infant observation to study emotional and relational aspects of interactions. Discussion focuses on applying this approach to the study of young people with severe learning disabilities and, secondly, to evaluation of community initiatives in London's African communities, and concerns about child abuse relating to religious practices including witchcraft and spirit possession. The observational approach surfaces attitudes towards witchcraft practices and facilitates theorisations of their meaning in these contexts.