

Practitioners' experiences of student supervision in the bachelor of social work degree

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Abstract

The developing and evolving social welfare system in South Africa coupled with inadequate human and material resources and high staff workloads, all impact on student learning in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree. This paper focuses on the challenges experienced by social work practitioners with regard to student supervision in the BSW. A qualitative case study design was used, in which the researcher purposively selected social work practitioners involved at third-year level teaching and learning in the BSW at a selected South African university. The findings point to challenges relating to limited agency resources, institutional–agency cooperation and students' personal challenges. These findings have implications for social work education and practice in South Africa as well as for continued professional development of social workers and agencies who offer student placements to universities.

Introduction

Similar to other professional social, human and health sciences programmes offered by higher education institutions the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree involves a theory and a practice component. Professional development and facilitation of learning in higher education is achieved through practice-based learning when theory and practice are integrated (Oko, 2008; Morgan, 2006; Koh, 2002; Spouse, 2001). The integration process occurs when theory is consulted during the process of learning clinical skills (Morgan, 2006). Synergy between field experience and classroom learning is, therefore, vital. This synergy is the responsibility of academics and social workers employed at social services agencies that provide practice placements for BSW students.

Social workers who facilitate field supervision of BSW students at the social services agencies should be able to make connections (for the student) between classroom learning and fieldwork training (Knight, 2001). In so doing, the methods for fieldwork assessment will be appropriate and aligned to classroom learning. It is thus necessary for field supervisors to have in-depth knowledge of the curriculum content covered in the classroom. Similarly it is important for academics to know what students do in fieldwork placements. The practice component of the BSW involves learning outcomes for which students must complete learning tasks in the prescribed timeframe and standards prescribed by the

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