

# Mapping Fieldwork and Supervision Practice in the Social Professions (Part 1)

Hilary Tierney

## Abstract

Despite historical and contemporary ambivalence (Banks, 2004) towards professionalisation, it is a *de facto* reality in both youth work and community work. Professionalisation is manifested, in part, by a concern with standards of, and criteria for, initial professional education and training programmes at third level, including requirements for supervised fieldwork. Little is known about the experiences, practices, and perceptions of fieldwork supervisors in these contexts (Spencer and McDonald, 1998). The mapping exercise documented in two parts (part two appears in the next issue) was undertaken as part of a larger scale practice research project designed to generate knowledge about supervisors' practice experiences. Part one firstly explores supervision in the social professions, highlighting its three-fold focus on accountability, learning and support. Secondly, fieldwork practice is examined with particular reference to the development of reflective practice.

## Keywords

Social professions; supervision; fieldwork placement; reflective practice.

## Introduction

Despite historical and contemporary ambivalence (Banks, 2004) towards professionalisation, it is a *de facto* reality in both youth work and community work. At its simplest, this means that some, but by no means all of the elements of the professionalisation process (Wilensky, 1964) are evident. Professionalisation is manifested, in part, by a concern with standards of, and criteria for, initial professional education and training programmes at third level. Sectoral endorsement of professional programmes sets out requirements and criteria for supervised fieldwork practice as a core component of such programmes. To date, both supervision practice and fieldwork practice in youth work and community work are under-researched and therefore under-documented. Little is known about the experiences, practices, and perceptions of fieldwork supervisors in these contexts (Spencer and McDonald, 1998). The mapping exercise documented here was undertaken as part of a larger scale practice research project designed to generate knowledge about supervisors' practice experiences.

The body of literature reviewed comes mainly from those practices known as the 'social professions', a term that has come to the fore in European contexts to describe those 'occupational groups involved in care, social control, informal education, and advocacy with a range of vulnerable, troublesome or 'disadvantaged' groups' (Banks,

1999). The concept of social profession itself ‘reflects a concern with commonalities in the work, as well as a tendency towards a blurring of boundaries between different occupational groups’ (Banks, 1999: 327). While it is a useful term in making connections across practices, the blurring of boundaries is potentially problematic for those contested occupations, such as youth work and community work, that claim a distinct purpose not based on a practitioner-client relationship. Nonetheless a consideration of the prevalent literature in relation to supervision in the social professions more generally is important.

In practice-focused research, one of the challenges is to unpack or interrogate concepts that are used daily in a common sense fashion and illuminate or provide additional understandings. In this spirit, the literature review is informed by Hawkins and Shohet’s (2006) idea of a ‘beginner’s mind’. Adopting a ‘beginner’s mind’ provides an opportunity to step outside long-standing frames of reference and assumptions in order to answer a number of ‘basic’ or ‘naïve’ questions relating to fieldwork and supervision in the social professions generally, and youth work and community work more specifically :

1. What is the function of supervision in the context of the social professions?
2. How is fieldwork practice placement defined in the literature?
3. Are there distinctive features of student supervision in the context of fieldwork placement?
4. What approaches support practitioners supervising effectively during fieldwork practice placement?

Each of the substantive questions above generates a number of sub-questions, each of which are addressed over the course of two articles. This article, part one, explores supervision and fieldwork practice in the social professions. Part two addresses the final two areas of student supervision and supports for supervisors.

## Mapping supervision

### What is the function of supervision in the context of the social professions?

The roots of the word supervision comes from the Latin ‘to oversee’ and can be found in traditional ideas around apprenticeship. The practice of supervision in the social professions emerged in the late 19th century development of charitable organisations when paid supervisors oversaw voluntary visitors in early forms of social work and casework (Kadushin, 1992). These early models conceptualised supervision as managerial and therefore inherently hierarchical, a contested view that is at the heart of some of the tensions and debates in supervision literature and practice today.

A detailed review of literature on supervision across a range of social professions carried out by Kilminster and Jolly (2000) concluded that ‘supervision is a complex activity, occurring in a variety of settings, has various definitions, functions and modes of delivery’ (Kilminster and Jolly, 2000: 828-9) as illustrated by the definitions below:

‘Basically it [supervision] consisted of two professional workers who met together, and whose exchanges were about work. Through the exchanges

the supervisor helped the worker to learn – to understand himself better in his job, to become more competent, and to understand how to supervise’ (Tash, 1967: 22).

‘Supervision is a process that positively encourages us to reflect on our professional practice, exploring attitudes and values and how they impact on our actions and interventions. The role of a supervisor is to enhance another person’s ability to reflect critically on his practice so that an understanding of the basis for action can be developed’ (Wooder, 2008: 1).

Supervision in the context of learning is a space for supervisees ‘to explore their practice, build theory, attend to feelings and values and to examine how they may act’ (Smith, 1996: 1).

Supervision is a ‘dynamic learning and developmental process in which both parties learn and grow together’ (Page and Wosket, 1994: 40).

‘Supervision is a place where a living profession breathes and learns....supervision can be a very important part of taking care of oneself, staying open to new learning, and an indispensable part of...ongoing self-development, self-awareness and commitment to learning’. (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006)

These definitions share some common features while also demonstrating a diversity of emphasis. Commonly, supervision is conceptualised as a dynamic interpersonal process concerned with supporting workers, promoting learning and their professional development. It can be more or less hierarchical (Wooder, 2008) or more or less collaborative (Tash, 1967). The exchange may explicitly be mutually beneficial (Page and Wosket, 1994; Tash, 1967) or primarily concerned with the supervisee’s development (Smith, 1996; Wooder, 2008). There is an assumption that critical reflection on work activities and attention to feelings will contribute to theory building, thereby improving performance in a work context. Furthermore, it may be inferred that supervision offers some form of quality assurance for ‘service users’. Of the definitions highlighted above, Hawkins and Shohet (2006) are unique in their explicit placement of supervision as central to the whole profession’s development, beyond the needs and concerns of the individual practitioner.

### Three is the magic number

More generally, supervision is conceptualised as having three key functions across a range of disciplines including education, psychology and social work (Kilminster and Jolly, 2000); namely, management, education and support. Supervision may be of workers, paid and unpaid, as well as of students or trainees. The work of four theorists spanning some thirty years - Kadushin, (1976, 1992), Proctor (1987) and Hawkins and Shohet (2006) - as been and continues to be influential in informing supervision literature in the social professions. Key aspects of Kadushin’s, Proctor’s, and Hawkins and Shohet’s ideas are considered in turn.

## **Kadushin's Map**

Kadushin (1992: 20) is primarily concerned with organisational management. He builds on the work of Dawson (1926) and proposes three functions for supervision, namely *administrative*, *educational* and *supportive*. Each function is present to varying degrees in any supervision encounter and each is conceptualised as having a 'primary problem and primary goal' (Smith, 1996:1). The problem being confronted in the *administrative function*, which is associated with meeting instrumental needs, relates to the effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies. The goal of supervision is to ensure adherence to such policies and procedures and focuses on the supervisee's role in the agency. The supervisor has both an enabling and ensuring role (Brown and Bourne, 1996: 10) in that the supervisor is charged with the responsibility of enabling the worker to work to the best of their ability and ensuring that policy is implemented. The *educational function*, also associated with meeting instrumental needs, is concerned with the problem of a deficiency in worker knowledge. The goal is to address it by increasing knowledge and developing skills through reflection on and exploration of the work. The *supportive* function meets expressive needs and seeks to address problems of worker morale and satisfaction. The goal here is to improve morale, reduce work-related stresses and maintain a harmonious work environment. Smith (1996, 2005) criticises this model because it conceptualises the person being supervised as being deficient in some way, with supervision serving a remedial function. On the other hand, he acknowledges its enduring influence on thinking about supervision.

## **Proctor's Map**

Proctor's (1987: 24-27) starting point is that supervision operates along a spectrum between control and facilitation, though she defines it as a co-operative facilitative process with two aims. Firstly, supervision aims to enable the supervisee to develop as an effective working person. Secondly, supervision provides a forum in which the worker accounts for themselves and their work to assure themselves and others requiring accountability (including the college in the case of students on fieldwork placement) that they are practising responsibly. The model proposes three functions, broadly comparable to the enabling and ensuring aspects of supervision described above, though Proctor's counselling background is evident in some of the language introduced. The *normative* function is associated with administration/accountability and quality assurance. It is concerned with management and issues of safety for the client group. The *formative* function is broadly educational and focuses on skills, knowledge and professional development (learning). The *restorative* function is concerned with providing support to alleviate stress and identifying solutions to problems in practice. Despite the differences in language, the functions broadly parallel those proposed by Kadushin, though Smith (1996, 2005) suggests that substituting the term *normative* for *administrative* opens up the possibility of non-managerial supervision, a theme I will return to shortly.

## **Hawkins and Shohet's Map**

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) also propose three functions of supervision. Firstly it has a *qualitative* dimension; simply put, the focus is on improving the quality of the supervisee's work. Secondly, a *developmental* focus attends to supervisee work-related

competence and capacity and, finally, the *resourcing* function seeks to increase the supervisee's ability to resource and sustain themselves. Again, while different terms are used, the qualitative dimensions compare to both administrative and normative functions proposed by Kadushin and Proctor respectively. The same can be said about the similarity between developmental, educational and formative functions on the one hand and support, restorative and resourcing on the other. Hawkins and Shohet (1989, 2006) also identified a range of foci of supervision including reflection and feedback, understanding and skills development, validation and support, and quality of work. These foci are broadly comparable to the functions as described by both Kadushin and Proctor; for example, the development of understanding and skill has an educational function, and ensuring the quality of work could have both an administrative and a supportive function.

Hawkins and Shohet (2006: 60) identify four vertical categories of supervision. The working assumption here is that the supervisor is in a hierarchical position, and is more experienced than the person they supervise. The categories of vertical supervision are tutorial, training, managerial and consultancy/professional supervision. In tutorial supervision, the focus is on the developmental/educational or formative function of students in training, where the other functions are carried out by someone else. The focus is largely developmental though the supervisor, for instance a fieldwork supervisor will also have some responsibility for the work of the student. The particular characteristics of student supervision during fieldwork are discussed in part two in the next issue. Clinical or direct first-hand observation of the work in action may be seen as a subset of training supervision. Managerial supervision is carried out by a line manager with a worker, while in consultancy supervision the worker maintains responsibility for their work but consults with a supervisor who is an experienced practitioner but is neither a manager nor a trainer. Examples of horizontal supervision such as peer supervision in groups or one-to-one are not explored here.

One of the issues that gets obscured to some extent in focusing on the functions of supervision - though it is implicit in the idea of vertical supervision above - is the issue of power, and how that 'plays out' in the supervision relationship. It has been alluded to above and is discussed in more detail along with other issues of power in the next section. The section's title is borrowed from the medieval map makers' phrase 'here be dragons' to denote edges, places that are unexplored or simply unfamiliar and somewhat scary.

## **'Here be Dragons' – in whose interests?**

At this point, I turn briefly to one of the recurring tensions in supervision, between 'managerial' supervision and what has become known as 'non-managerial' supervision (also sometimes called consultant or professional supervision). In simple terms, a distinction is made between different starting points of supervision, based on the perceived locus of power. In managerial supervision, the assumption is that the interests of the employing organisation are a priority and that the supervisor, who is also manager, will focus on the administrative function at the expense of the support and development needs of the individual who is being supervised. Conversely, non-managerial supervision - that is supervision by someone to whom the supervisee is not

accountable - is more likely to fulfil educational and supportive functions. Rushton and Nathan (1996: 370–71) argue against this split, stating that the ‘person performing the concerned sympathetic professional supervision may be idealised, while the inquisitorial manager may be the recipient of negative projections’.

A focus on the relationship of supervisor and supervisee to the exclusion of their accountability both to a ‘community of practice’ or profession, the larger sector, and to those with whom they work with does not seem very useful (Kadushin, 1992; Page and Wosket, 1994; Hawkins and Shohet, 1987). The gendered nature of supervision should be noted. For instance, Crespi, (1995) associates aspects of supervision that are more instrumental or action-focused - for example, deciding, organising, accountability and effectiveness - with ‘masculine’ characteristics while those in the expressive domain, for example empathy, understanding and support, where issues of power, authority and hierarchy are downplayed, are more associated with ‘feminine’ characteristics (Munson, 1997). Whether one does or does not accept the gendered association of these characteristics, both sets need to be present in an effective supervision practice that integrates both instrumental and expressive approaches, a concern with the task as well as the process of supervision (Kadushin, and Harkness, 2002). Nonetheless, traditional male ‘sexist attitudes’ have been problematic in cross-gender supervision for female students with male supervisors in social work education (Behling et al, 1982). In other studies, male social workers were found to react negatively to assertive female supervisors (Petty and Odewahn, 1983). This was often the first time outside familial situations that they had to deal with a woman in authority, and had to face their own unrecognised values and attitudes (Nadelson and Notman, 1977). Conversely, other stereotypical gendered behaviours may also come to the fore, for example flirtation, reluctance to talk about certain sorts of issues, deference and protectiveness may also come into play (Kadushin and Harkness, 1976).

Equally, the issue of cultural differences between student and fieldwork supervisor needs attention as more students from diverse cultures including Travellers enter professional education and training. There is potential at least for cross-cultural misunderstanding as well as for both covert and overt prejudice and racism to impinge on the relationship. In Irish youth work and community work contexts, it is far more likely that supervisors will be from the majority culture (white, Irish, settled) and will need to both ‘clarify their own identities’ and learn about other cultures’ ‘lifestyles, communication patterns, discrimination experiences, attitudes towards authority, approaches to problem-solving ..’ in order to supervise effectively (Kadushin and Harkness, 1976: 297).

Any model of supervision based on the three inter-related functions summarised as accountability, learning and support, that does not consider issues of power and authority prevalent in the wider society, is limited. Sensitivity to these concerns is particularly important in a context where the practice being supervised has an explicit commitment to empowerment of marginalised groups, as in the case of youth work and community work. Models of supervision highlighting the three inter-related functions summarised above are also influential in youth work and community work supervision literature, which is examined next.

## Supervision in youth work and community work literature

There is a limited literature related directly to supervision in youth work and community work, which originated mainly in the 1970s and 80s in the UK. Relevant literature originating in Ireland is limited to a National Youth Federation (now Youth Work Ireland) publication (O'Donovan and Loughry, 2000). There has been a more recent literature in relation to student supervision in fieldwork which is considered in part two in the next issue. The early work on supervision in youth work was developed within the YMCA, where supervision is considered both a 'particular kind of work and a particular kind of working relationship' (Christian and Kitto, 1987: 2). Youth work practice is located among the 'helping professions', stressing that it may mean working in isolation and/or in emotionally charged situations. In this scenario, supervision is seen as a 'means of promoting values that should be at the heart of all youth work'.

Christian and Kitto's (1987) preferred model is professional or non-managerial supervision, though they acknowledge that the practice of supervision itself is not widespread. The role of the supervisor is to enable the worker to think 'better' about their work and therefore work 'better'. While the tensions inherent in the 'manager as supervisor' role are recognised, little attention is paid to this, though there is a good deal of attention paid to how supervision might work in the professional context. Interestingly, in Christian and Kitto's model, supervision functions for the benefit of the worker alone, there is no mention of a 'community of practice' or young people. Any additional benefits for the supervisor or young people are 'incidental and entirely irrelevant' (Christian and Kitto, 1987: 4).

### *Three is still the magic number*

In an exploration of supervision in community work, Harris (1977) also works with the three functions of administrative (accountability), education (learning) and support, and outlines what that might mean in contexts where the supervisor is also a line manager. In contrast to the concerns about managerial supervision noted earlier, Harris (1977: 33) does not consider the supervisor as primarily a 'company' man or woman when carrying out the administrative function. The supervision process may also require the supervisor to 'go to bat' for the supervisee, for instance to advocate for and gain support for a particular approach with the management committee (Harris, 1977: 34). In terms of the education function, the aim is to maintain and raise the level of practice, in a context where the supervisor understands the personal ideology that motivates workers and how it interplays with the administrative function. Harris (1977) outlines two aspects to this function; self-development and the acquisition of skills and knowledge developed within a theoretical framework for practice, around which both supervisor and supervisee can organise thought and action. Supervision can help a worker to explore the impact of their appreciative system (that is, perceived reality and values) on the work as well as develop both their technical and interactional capacities in the work. Harris (1977: 40) acknowledges the contested nature of community work, and notes that employers can have differing expectations or understandings of the work in general, and the role of the worker in particular situations. In these cases, the supervisor has an educative function with the employer and others in positions of



power and influence. This means that the supervisor essentially acts as ‘guardian of the practitioner definition’, seeking to maintain the integrity of the workers while maximising the understanding and acceptance of community work approaches among local stakeholders such as employers, community groups, and committee members. Finally, the supportive role is about helping workers cope with the pressures and stresses of working in a challenging, and sometimes, overwhelming environment as well as dealing with the disappointments and frustrations of evolving practice situations. Harris, (1977: 42) states that the goal of supervision is to help workers become ‘more independent, self-critical and self-directing’, but does not say much about how this might happen in practice.

In the Irish context, an EU funded cross-national Leonardo project, led by the National Youth Federation (now Youth Work Ireland), examined supervision in the context of youth work, community work, community arts and other cultural activities that ‘seek to nurture the participation of those who have been marginalised from civic society’ (O’Donovan and Loughry, 2000: 4). In common with the models already discussed, the same three functions of supervision are identified: workload management (accountability) educational (learning), and support/enabling. Interestingly the educational function is the one that is prioritised, citing the role of the supervisor as facilitating the supervisee’s learning in the most effective way. O’Donovan and Loughry (2000) identify a number of practice models that draw strongly on psychological theory. They emphasise the process of supervision which ‘seeks to maintain an effective level of interest for both supervisor and supervisee and to allow for progress and growth’ (2000: 4). They also outline seven elements in the process of supervision which fulfil the three functions associated with accountability, learning and support and may overlap in practice. The elements are: imagination, variety, thought, reflection, focus, learning and goals, each of which impacts on both supervisor and supervisee focus in the supervision process. Overall, the approach explicitly addresses issues of power and anti-oppressive practice in the supervision relationship. However it is defined, supervision in a variety of settings is a complex activity, being both a role and a function that is concerned with issues of ensuring accountability, promoting learning and providing support - to a greater or lesser extent - to those who work, or are learning to work in the social professions.

### Where to now?

Despite the ongoing discussion about the relative merits of managerial and non-managerial supervision, a number of working assumptions are at the heart of the three models proposed by Kadushin, (1976, 1992), Proctor (1987) and Hawkins and Shohet (2006). Firstly, the assumption is that both the supervisor and supervisee have a shared interest in work being ‘done well’. Secondly, they also have a shared responsibility in ensuring the work is actually ‘done well’. Finally, it also assumes that there is the possibility of having some shared agreement of what that (work ‘done well’) might look like. However, there are some differences in emphasis. Kadushin focuses on supervisor roles of manager, educator and supporter, while Proctor’s concern is more with the person being supervised, what is happening for them in terms of supervision, and Hawkins and Shohet look at joint processes.



Nonetheless, as Smith (1996) points out, whatever terms are used, the three broad functions of supervision associated with accountability, learning and support are inter-related and can be attributed to the same activities. For example, a worker's 'report can be part of a system of accountability as it is being prepared, the supervisor may explore with the worker the audience and intended impact of the report (learning) and the report itself may be used by the supervisor to help the worker to explore how their work has progressed (supportive)' (Harris, 1977). It is evident that supervision does not exist in a vacuum; it is embedded in an occupational and organisational context. It is to an aspect of this context we next turn, fieldwork practice placement.

## **Mapping Fieldwork**

### **How is fieldwork practice placement defined in the social professions?**

In common with other social professions, supervised fieldwork practice (sometimes called practicum, field education, or practice placement in other settings) is an integral part of professional programmes of education and training in youth work and community work. Fieldwork involves a period or periods of time-limited experience in a youth work or community work organisation. The idea is that students learn 'on the job' under the supervision of a worker chosen by the college or agency. Fieldwork is a dynamic experience of which students often retain 'vivid memories' (Wilson, 2000: 26). In many instances, successful completion of the entire programme is dependent on successful completion of the fieldwork component. As a result, preparation for, participation in, and reflection on fieldwork is a significant feature of life for students and staff alike, albeit from different perspectives. Fieldwork practice as a central tenet of professional programmes is reiterated in the criteria for endorsement of the All-Ireland endorsement process for youth work (NSETS, 2006), as well as in the emerging framework for community work standards and endorsement (CWC, 2008). In a wide-ranging study of fieldwork practice in education and training for the social professions across the UK, USA and Canada, Webber (1999, 2000a) found that students, supervisors and staff all believed that fieldwork is a valuable teaching and learning tool, though cites little by way of evidence for this belief. The study of thirty-four institutions found a great deal of diversity in both clarity about the objectives of fieldwork and the amount of resources allocated to fieldwork education. This diversity contributes to a considerable variance in the quality of student experience and practices in relation to the purpose and organisation of fieldwork placement.

#### ***Purpose and models of fieldwork placement***

The variation mentioned above is partly attributable to the fact that the purposes of fieldwork have not always been articulated beyond a vague belief in exposure to fieldwork as a 'good thing'. However, there is a general agreement that the purpose of fieldwork practice is to 'enable students to link theory to practice' (Webber, 2000a: 2). In more practical terms, Holmes and Bryant (1977: 153-154) proposes twin objectives for fieldwork, both of which explicitly include a capacity to make theory-practice connections. The first of these objectives relates to how 'agencies operate, and the types and range of issues, problems and controversies which can influence the activities of full-time workers

and local residents'. The second refers to the development of practice skills, that is, 'arts, techniques, information and insights workers need and know as they organise and apply their knowledge and experience in action situations'. Some twenty years later, Webber (1999) outlined a range of objectives for field work which reflect the same concern with organisational, sectoral and contextual issues, skills development, and 'putting theory into practice'. Those expanded objectives include a focus on students:

- Developing and maintaining professional relationships
- Practising skills and knowledge
- Applying theory to practice
- Understanding profession in a particular context
- Working professionally (for instance, informed, reflective, competent)
- Being a reflective practitioner
- Being a questioning person
- Managing social change
- Understanding the world of work.

The question arises as to how those objectives can be implemented in practice and what approaches to fieldwork practice help to meet these objectives? Webber (1999) goes on to identify some eight models of fieldwork practice, rating them according to the emphasis placed on linking theory and practice. The models are briefly described below:

1. Reflective Learner – strong ideological commitment to the concept of 'the reflective learner' (Schön, 1983, 1991). Includes the ideas that people can learn as much from failures as successes and 'theory into action', that is, understanding of the theoretical basis of practice.
2. Academic Apprenticeship – combines academic and theoretical components with aspects of traditional apprenticeship. Students work part of the week and attend college the rest of the week. Students expected to include practice experience in academic work and *vice versa*.
3. Competency – associated with practice standards. The focus is on the acquisition of pre-determined skills and standards of performance which can run into tens if not scores of separate items categorised within distinct practice areas.
4. Individual Development – combines some elements of the competency and reflective learner models though focuses more on setting goals for own individual learning and development.
5. Macro Theories – students learn and apply major theoretical and/or philosophical concepts to aspects of practice. Little focus on skills.
6. Social Change – equips students to engage in social change and develop an understanding of the relationship between theoretical and practical issues in the context of managing the constraints of economic and political issues on an organisation's work.
7. Job Training model – emphasis on learning the culture of work while relating knowledge learned in university to practice; found largely in generalist internship programmes in the USA.
8. Career Selection model – a 'toe in the water' – also found largely in generalist internship programmes in the USA and Canada.

While students have direct exposure to action and practice situations in all the above models of fieldwork, there is a good deal of difference in how they rated on both theory and practice components. For instance, the reflective practitioner and academic apprenticeship models were 'rated highly on both theory and practice components' (Webber, 1999: 2), while the job training and career selection models rated low on both components. The competency and individual development models were rated highly on skills and low on theory components. These latter models in particular are indicative of a somewhat crude and ultimately unhelpful delineation that locates academic learning in the academy and practice learning in the field (Holmes and Bryant, 1977). This in turn reinforces an entrenched 'theory-practice dichotomy' (Bloxham and Heathfield, 1987; Ledwith, 2007) in both youth work and community work, one that was noted by Webber (2000b) whose study revealed confusion about different levels of theory, little evidence of theory driving practice, and students viewing theory as 'as elitist, remote and disconnected from the world of work'.

In a context where the primary objective of fieldwork practice placement is to link theory and practice, it is somewhat disappointing to note that Webber (2000a) identified a failure adequately to link theory to practice as a critical issue in fieldwork practice. The models that appear to offer the most potential to achieve the goal of linking theory and practice in fieldwork placement are those that rated highly on both theory and practice components, that is, the reflective learner and academic apprenticeship models. These models underpin the professional endorsement criteria for fieldwork practice in both the youth work (NSETS, 2006) and community work (CWC, 2008) fields. It is worth noting at this point that both these models emphasise the role of supervision in assisting students to reflect on their practice, something that is explored further in the part two in the next issue. Both the reflective practice and academic apprenticeship models are also evident in the approach of the Department of Applied Social Studies (DAPPSS) at NUI Maynooth to fieldwork practice in the full-time and part-time in-service programmes respectively. The Department's fieldwork placement handbook, given to all students and supervisors, states that: 'the overall purpose of the placement is to assist students - in a context where they are learning through doing - to acquire, and reflect upon, knowledge and skills for youth work and community work practice...They are expected to make their practice conscious rather than merely intuitive' (DAPPSS, 2008: 2). Simply put, students are expected to put the theory of college-based learning into action during fieldwork practice, a goal consistent with Webber's (1999, 2000a) findings. Fundamentally, fieldwork practice is conceptualised as a learning process, an 'act of construction, where the learners are constructors who make meaning for themselves in response to learning challenges they face' (LaBoskey and Rickert, 2002: 18). This raises the question of the characteristics of fieldwork placements that facilitate that meaning-making process.

## **Effective fieldwork placements**

LaBoskey and Rickert (2002) set out to identify the components of good student teacher placements. They point to a number of factors of effective placements that could be usefully transferred to youth work and community work settings when thinking about the opportunities for students learning on fieldwork placement.

Students are expected to undertake a complex array of tasks (Webber, 1999: 5) during fieldwork placement including: negotiating formal supervision arrangements and keeping record including a reflective diary which is then often the basis for supervision. In addition, they must complete reports and paperwork, while keeping up with reading and learning materials, plan and carry out community work or youth work and explore power and equal opportunity relationships. LaBoskey and Rickert (2002) outline four aspects of student learning and development on fieldwork placement as they undertake that 'complex array of tasks':

- a) Initially, students recognise practice principles in action;
- b) This is followed by reflection on the circumstances that contributed to the enactment or not of those principles;
- c) Students then consciously enact those principles in their own practice;
- d) Finally they embrace those principles as the foundation of their own practice'.

This represents an idealised learning cycle; a linear process from 'a' through 'b', 'c' and on to 'd' is by no means automatic or inevitable. Along with Webber (1999, 2000a), LaBoskey and Rickert (2002) highlight the centrality of the supervisor role in helping students learn about practice principles from fieldwork. The LaBoskey and Rickert (2002) study concludes that students are more likely to be able to be learners about their own practice where supervisors are also engaged as learners about their own practice. This contributes to a fieldwork placement experience characterised by collegiality, exploration of beliefs and values, and encouragement of risk-taking within a reflective and facilitative environment. In addition, well-designed coursework can trigger reflection, supervisors can function as supports if they are well versed in the principles underpinning practice, and compatible placements are more conducive to growth. In practical terms, weak or incompatible placements, that is, those that did not exhibit any of the positive characteristics such as collegiality, reflection and risk-taking, are more detrimental if they are the first fieldwork placement, as students have fewer personal and practice resources to deal with the challenges that arose.

Webber's study (1999, 2000a) also identified a range of factors that contributed to effective fieldwork placements. Institutions have different practices in relation to the organisation of placements along a spectrum ranging from all-college organised to all-student organised, though many involve meeting the potential supervisor as part of the preparation process. This in itself does not appear to be an indicator of quality in placement experience, though the factors identified included the provision of appropriate documentation, training for supervisors, clear aims and achievable objectives for placement. On one level, while these are concerned with the practicalities of fieldwork arrangements, they require clarity about the roles and responsibilities of all parties especially in relation to an assessment function. Effective negotiation of the supervisory relationship requires a deeper level of thinking about the purpose of fieldwork overall and its relationship to other aspects of the programme. In light of the above, preparation of both student and supervisor for the whole placement experience is an important aspect of maximising the possibility of an effective fieldwork experience for the student, supervisor and fieldwork organisations.

Some of the advantages for organisations of taking students on placement include the internal reflection triggered by students' critical questioning of philosophy, structure and methods of the agency. Placements facilitate practitioner contact with the

college and other supervisors; students can bring current thinking and knowledge into the organization; the process of reflection and joint exploration can act to deepen knowledge and understandings and extend horizons for both (Holmes and Bryant, 1977). At the very least, in purely practical terms students on placements can be an additional source of labour in over-stretched organisations, though colleges have a tendency to be very wary of this as a sole motivation to provide student placements. On the other hand, some of the challenges for organisations in facilitating student placement include, for example, the potential issues in accountability raised by the duality of student loyalty to college and placement organisation. The practitioner who takes on the fieldwork supervisor function has a key role in managing those challenges.

## **Thinking about the fieldwork supervisor**

Holmes and Bryant (1977) outline four inter-related stages in the fieldwork placement, namely planning, student orientation, task-centred activity and student withdrawal and evaluation, each of which makes different demands on the practitioner and student. In addition, they also identify three major roles for the practitioner in relation to student fieldwork placements: supervisor, liaison with the training agency, and engaging in their own ongoing work. The supervision role covers the spectrum of planning an appropriate work programme, introducing the student to the agency, to local groups, formal supervision sessions and to informal contact as well as final assessment and evaluation. In addition, finding focused time for supervision, workload management, and identifying learning in the somewhat more hectic and unpredictable situations that frequently arise in the work are also considerations for the fieldwork supervisor. Equally the boundaries, limitations, expectations and goals of supervision must be negotiated and communicated. All of this takes place against a backdrop of limited or inconsistent investment in training and support for supervisors (Webber, 1999, 2000a).

Re-iterating the importance of the supervisor role, LaBoskey and Rickert (2002) identify the 'ideal student placement' as one where the supervisor's philosophy is consistent with that of the college, where the student sees principles of the practice modelled by the supervisor. In addition, other aspects of the supervisory relationship were highlighted, including the student's need for that relationship to be 'safe, supportive and conducive to reflective conversation' allowing them to 'talk freely, share ideas and struggles and learn together through collaborative conversation about practice' (LaBoskey and Rickert, 2002: 10). Emphasising the shared collaborative responsibility for supervision between student and supervisor is influential in maximising student learning and thereby ensuring an effective fieldwork placement.

## **Assessment of fieldwork practice**

The issue of assessment of fieldwork practice is a challenging one and has been briefly mentioned above and deserves some attention before moving on. Webber (1999) again found a variety of approaches to assessment across programmes in Europe and North America. Two approaches seem to dominate; firstly, criterion-referenced assessment where student performance is assessed against a 'pre-determined set of competencies or expectations' (1999: 34). The second model is individual-referenced, where each student's

performance is assessed against their previous levels of performance. The assessment function is generally, though by no means universally, carried out by some mixture of self-assessment by the student, visits by college staff to the fieldwork organisation, and reports by the supervisor. The supervisor 'is not ultimately responsible for passing or failing a student' in the vast majority of situations (Webber, 1999:7). That is not to say that the supervisor does not have a role in assessment, more that the university department makes the final decision. The emergence of professional endorsement frameworks in the UK and Ireland has brought some consistency to the arrangements for fieldwork and assessment in professional programmes at third level. This includes clarification of the criteria for assessment and ensuring supervisor clarity about their role. Webber argues strongly for the university department making the pass/fail decision, asserting that 'supervision should be about student learning and not be coloured by the supervisor's ability to fail the student' (1999:7). Practices relating to the weighting attached to any student self-assessment in fieldwork vary; some remain at the level of lip-service, while others adopt a more integrated process where students are directly involved in making recommendations on their assessment. Whatever approach is adopted, the key is consistency between fieldwork aims and assessment mode that is communicated clearly to all involved.

### Key points on the fieldwork map

Fieldwork practice placements are an integral part of programmes of education and training in the social professions. A wide-ranging study of fieldwork arrangements in thirty-four institutions across three continents (Webber, 1999) revealed a diverse range of approaches, a multiplicity of objectives, as well as a variety of practices in relation to provision and resourcing. There is some agreement that a key goal of fieldwork practice is students linking theory to practice while on a time-limited placement in a youth work or community work organisation. Organisations both benefit from and are challenged by student fieldwork placements, which can be more or less successful in meeting that goal. Of a total of eight models identified (Webber, 1999), two (reflective practice and academic apprenticeship) are rated highly on both practice and theory components. The role of the fieldwork supervisor, itself a multi-faceted role, is particularly important in supporting students to make those connections in both formal and informal contexts on placement. Equally student learning is maximised when they engage with supervisors who themselves are committed to ongoing learning about their own practice - in other words, supervisors who model the practice for which students are being prepared. Conversely there is an acknowledgement that often, little attention is given to support and training for supervisors, something that is considered in the second part of this article (*Youth Studies Ireland* 6:2) along with the complex issue of assessment of fieldwork practice.

### References

- Banks, S. (1999) 'The social professions and social policy: proactive or reactive?' *European Journal of Social Work*, 2(30): 327-339.
- Banks, S. (2004) *Ethics, Accountability and the Social Professions*. New York: Palgrave.
- Beddoe, E. (2000) 'The supervisory relationship', in, eds L. Cooper, L. and Briggs, L (eds) *Fieldwork in the Human Services*. New South Wales: Allen and Unwin.

- Beddoe, L. and Davys, A. (1994) 'The status of supervision-reflection from a training perspective', *Social Work Review*, 5&6: 16–21.
- Behling, J.; Curtis, C. and Foster, S.A. (1982) 'Impact of sex-role combinations on student performance in field instruction'. *Journal of Education for Social Work* 18:(2):93–97.
- Bloxham, S. and Heathfield, M. (1995) 'Rejecting the theory / practice dichotomy in Youth and Community Work Training' *Youth & Policy*, Winter 1995, 50:35–48.
- Brown, A. and Bourne, I. (1996) *The Social Work Supervisor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Christian, C. and Kitto, J. (1987, reprinted 2003) *The Theory and Practice of Supervision*. Occasional Paper 1. London: George Williams College, YMCA.
- Crespi, T. (1995) 'Gender Sensitive Supervision: Exploring Feminist Perspectives for Male and Female Supervisors', *The Clinical Supervisor*, 13(2): 19–29.
- Community Workers' Cooperative (2008) *Towards Standards for Quality Community Work: An All Ireland Statement of Values, Principles and Work Standards*. Galway: CWC. <http://cwc.ie/cwc/resources/publications-2/towards-standards.html>
- DAPPSS (2008) *Fieldwork Practice Placement Handbook for Students and Supervisors*. Maynooth: Department of Applied Social Studies, NUIM.
- Dawson, J. B. (1926) 'The casework supervisor in a family agency', *Family* 6 :293–295.
- Harris, P. (1977) 'Staff Supervision in Community Work', in Briscoe, C and Thomas, D (eds) *Community Work: Learning and Supervision*. National Institute. Social Service Library No. 32. London. George Allen and Unwin.
- Hawkins, P. and Shohet, R. (1989, 2006) *Supervision in the Helping Professions* (1st/3rd eds). Buckinghamshire: Open University Press.
- Holmes, B. and Bryant, R. (1977) 'Fieldwork Teaching in Community Work', in Briscoe, C. and Thomas, D. (eds.) *Community Work: Learning and Supervision*. National Institute. Social Service Library No. 32. London. George Allen and Unwin.
- Kadushin, A. (1992) *Supervision in Social Work* (3rd. ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kadushin, A. and Harness, D (1976, 2002) *Supervision in Social Work* (1st and 4th eds). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kilminster, S. M., and Jolly, B.C. (2000) 'Effective supervision in clinical practice settings: A literature review', *Medical Education*, 34: 827–840.
- LaBoskey, V. and Richert, A. (2002) 'Identifying good student teaching placements: A programmatic perspective', *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 29(2): 7–34.
- Ledwith, M. (2007) 'Reclaiming the radical agenda: a critical approach to community development', *Concept*, 17(2):8–12.
- Munson, C. E. (1997) 'Gender and psychotherapy supervision: The partnership model', in Watkins, C.E. (ed.), *Handbook of Psychotherapy Supervision*, New York: Wiley.
- Nadelson C, Notman M. (1977) 'Psychotherapy supervision: the problem of conflicting values', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 31(2): 275–283.
- NSETS (2006) *Criteria and Procedures for the Professional Endorsement of Youth Work Education and Training* (unpublished guidelines). Belfast and Dublin: North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work.
- O'Donovan, D. and Loughry, R. (2000) *Supervision: Practitioners in Social Contexts*. Dublin: Irish Youth Work Centre.



- Page, S. and Wosket, V. (1994) *Supervising the Counsellor: A Cyclical Model*. London: Routledge.
- Petty, M. and Odewahn, C. (1983) 'Supervisory Behavior and Sex Role Stereotypes in Human Service Organizations', *The Clinical Supervisor*, 1(2):13–20.
- Proctor, B. (1987) 'Supervision: A cooperative exercise in accountability' in Marken, M. and Payne, M. (eds), *Enabling and ensuring supervision in practice*. Leicester: National Youth Bureau and Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work.
- Rushton, A. and Nathan, J. (1996) 'The supervision of child protection work', *British Journal of Social Work*, 26: 357–374.
- Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner*. London: Ashgate Publishers.
- Schön, D. A. (1991) *The Reflective Turn: Case Studies In and On Educational Practice*. New York: Teachers Press, Columbia University.
- Smith, M. K. (1996, 2005) 'The functions of supervision', *infed.org, the encyclopedia of informal education*, retrieved from [http://www.infed.org/biblio/functions\\_of\\_supervision.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/functions_of_supervision.htm)
- Spencer, A. and McDonald, C. (1998) 'Omissions and commissions: An analysis of professional field education literature', *Australian Social Work*, 51(4): 9–18.
- Tash, J. (1967) *Supervision in Youth Work*. London: National Council of Social Services.
- Webber, R. (1999) 'Is there a difference between bungee jumping and field supervision?'. Paper presented to the HERDSA Annual Conference, Melbourne, 12-15 July 1999.
- Webber, R. (2000a) 'Field education practices in youth studies courses in England, USA and Canada'. *Youth Studies Australia*, 19:1.
- Webber, R. (2000b) 'Having a field day: The theory-practice conundrum in youth and community studies courses in England, USA and Canada' *Youth and Policy*, 67: 55–67.
- Wilensky, H.L. (1964) 'The professionalization of everyone?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 70(2): 137–158.
- Wilson, J. E. (2000) 'Approaches to supervision in fieldwork', in Cooper, L. and Briggs, L. (eds) *Fieldwork in the Human Services*. NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Wooder, K (2008) 'Mindful practices: Buddhism and supervision', *Contexts Vol 1*. London: YMCA George Williams College, Centre for Third Sector Studies.

## Biographical Note

Dr Hilary Tierney lectures in the Department of Applied Social Studies at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and teaches across the Department's undergraduate and postgraduate professional programmes in the areas of youth work, professional skills development and research theory and practice. She has previously worked in both youth work and community work settings, specialising in organisational development practice and in education and training for the emerging profession in further education and at third level.

## Contact

Email: [hilary.tierney@nuim.ie](mailto:hilary.tierney@nuim.ie)

Tel.: +353 1 7086489