



Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field

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1. Executive Summary

Whilst research has long been considered a critical component of social work education, previous research has identified concerns about student and graduate competence, confidence, and attitude towards research. These concerns, together with calls for learning about research to be situated in practice settings, led us to consider how research teaching might become more fully integrated into field education. This project was therefore designed to facilitate authentic, research focussed, learning and teaching experiences for social work students on placement in a range of social service industry settings.

The study was conducted within Christchurch city during the second half of 2011 and was funded by Ako Aotearoa Southern Hub. Project facilitators from both the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) and the University of Canterbury social work programmes collaborated to support applied research learning with nine students and their field educators across nine different agency settings. The project adopted a mixed methods approach that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection strategies. Data collection methods included a research confidence survey, structured student journals, and audio recorded and filmed interviews with both the students and field educators.

Although analysis of the questionnaires did not include statistical tests, findings indicate that having completed a practice research placement, students' level of confidence with research increased, particularly in areas related to the practical tasks that they had experienced. The findings from the interviews confirmed that students developed their understanding and confidence with research during their placements. Thematic analysis also highlighted a range of important considerations and strategies when planning and supporting practice research field education. A developmental approach was important to ensure that the research objectives for the students were achievable and also to encourage agencies to develop a research agenda that a number of students could participate in over a lengthy time period. Students faced a number of challenges related to a sense of isolation or questions over the legitimacy of research tasks for social workers, often related to the views of other students or colleagues in the host agency. Strategies that students and field educators developed to overcome these challenges, and others related to prioritising

time and supervision for research, were significant for improving the quality of research placements. Analysis of the interviews also indicates that there were a number of important impacts from undertaking the research placements. The projects added to the research capacity in agencies and contributed to their learning, policy, and funding initiatives. Students contributed to the development of practice and to service evaluation and addressed gaps in current knowledge.

The findings from the analysis of the interviews highlighted a range of strategies that can be used to facilitate successful research placements. We have provided specific recommendations related to creating a research environment in the agency, and issues concerning the field educator role, the student role and the contribution of the academic institution. We have also identified what we see as the critical components of the model used in this project to develop practice research field education.

This project has also led to the development of resources that can be used to facilitate learning and teaching about research both in the classroom and in the field. An online video resource has been produced from interviews undertaken with students and field educators. In these interviews participants talk about their experiences of undertaking practice research, the challenges they faced and overcame, and the strategies that they developed to be successful. We have also produced a set of learning and teaching cards which discuss issues related to learning about research that have proved pertinent in this project. The intention is that these cards will be used by field educators and academics to create a dialogue with students about aspects of research that they are exploring.

The following recommendations are proposed as a result of this project:

- To establish a formal 'Practice Research Community of Practice' for social workers through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Work.
- To develop and conduct research that quantifies the impacts of practice research placements for student learning and agency outputs.
- To refine the pre-post placement research confidence survey instrument and test for reliability and validity over the next two years with student research cohorts studying social work at CPIT and UC.

- To continue to develop and evaluate practice research placements across CPIT and UC with the view to partnering with other institutions nationally.
- Actively raise awareness about the integral role practice research plays in social work education, practice and policy avenues through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand.

Whilst this research has highlighted the benefits of practice research field education, identified some significant strategies to facilitate successful placements, and developed practical learning and teaching resources, the real benefit of undertaking the project can be seen in the following quote from one of the student participants:

“My research placement has greatly enhanced my learning about research. It not only provided me with a practical basis for conducting research but it also gave me an opportunity to reflect on the importance of research conducted within the field in regards to the development of effective social work practice.” Mary, Student.

2. Background

Social work as a discipline has a long tradition of including research as a core knowledge base and skill set for future practitioners (Dunlap, 1993). Most recently, the strident neoliberal political environment has produced financial constraints within health, welfare and income support sectors and heightened calls from government departments and philanthropic trusts for social services to demonstrate value for money in the work they do (Ferguson, 2008). Simultaneously, the drive towards promoting 'evidence based practice' (EBP) is now integral to service development, planning, delivery and evaluation across medicine, nursing and all allied health disciplines (Mathews & Crawford, 2011; Hoffman, Bennett & Del Mar, 2009). The requirement for social workers to demonstrate EBP has emerged alongside other practice and pedagogical developments including the growing recognition within the profession that research informed intervention improves practice (Orme & Powell, 2008), and the desire within the higher education sector to strengthen the teaching/research nexus (Jenkins & Healy, 2009). These emergent drivers have led to professional associations, service managers, tertiary education providers and welfare educators across the world to promote research literacy within social work education and practice (NASW, 2008; IFSW, 2012). Despite EBP becoming a dominant discourse across the nursing and allied health sector 'the field continues to rely on practices that have little supporting evidence or, at worst, have poor outcomes' (Barwick, Peters, Boydell, 2009).

Historically, social work students have had limited opportunity to develop research competence outside of the classroom setting (Lorenz, 2003), with recent research in New Zealand (Beddoe, 2011) and elsewhere (MacIntyre & Paul, 2012; Joubert, 2006) documenting low levels of confidence amongst social work graduates in conducting applied social research. Pleas have been made in earlier literature to situate research learning, particularly in relation to developing EBP within practice environments (Soden & Halliday, 2000; Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). Moreover, research on social worker attitudes towards research have been primarily conducted using quantitative measures, with less emphasis on understanding variations in attitudes and the factors contributing to them (Morgenshtern, Freymond, Agyapong & Greeson, 2011). These concerns about student and graduate competence,

confidence and attitude towards conducting research, together with calls to change the way research is taught, led us to consider how research teaching might become more fully integrated into field education. This project has therefore been designed to facilitate authentic research learning and teaching experiences for social work students on placement, in agencies where contemporary social issues and questions could be addressed.

Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field has focused on building research capacity amongst social work students, their supervisors and within local social service agency settings. The focus of the project has been to address reported low levels of practice research literacy and confidence amongst students and field educators; foster the knowledge production from empirical data and evaluation within the Canterbury social service industry, and improve research knowledge and skills. The project was conducted within Christchurch city during the second half of 2011 and was funded by Ako Aotearoa Southern Hub. Project facilitators from both the University of Canterbury and Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology social work programs worked in collaboration to support the applied research learning with nine students and their supervisors across nine different agency settings.

Project aim, objectives, and definitions

The aim of the project has been to: *foster and support collaborative teaching and learning of applied social work research skills in a range of social service industry settings.*

The project objectives were to:

- Facilitate opportunities to teach and learn research skills in diverse social service industry settings.
- Improve both classroom and field teaching and learning about research technique and knowledge building.
- Encourage the social service industry to increase opportunities for student research.
- Foster teaching excellence in practicum education.

- Model cross sector collaborative approaches to teaching, learning and research.
- Develop an educational model that informs future teaching and learning initiatives in the area of social research.

Using these objectives the project promoted understanding, knowledge and skills development in the area of 'practice research', that is, systematic inquiry focused on immediate practical application within the agency setting.

For the purposes of the project, practitioner research was defined as research conducted in the industry setting (placement agency) related to relevant social, professional or governance issues encountered by agency clients, practitioners or service management. This definition was informed by Dadds and Hart's understanding of practice based inquiry being 'a central commitment to the study of one's own professional practice by the researcher himself or herself, with a view of improving that practice for the benefit of others' (Dadds & Hart, 2001 cited in Lunt & Fouche, 2010 p.220). The 'others' referred to in this account would include current agency clients and potential users, governance boards, funders, practitioners and educators. The focus of the practice research activity was therefore intended to be of a practical nature with the view to improving social service development and delivery in response to contemporary accountability requirements.

The primary teaching and learning transaction within the placement setting occurs between the social work student and the agency field educator. The field educator is the industry based social work practitioner, who provides ongoing supervision for the student during the placement. This role is named '*field educator*', since education is the primary function based in the field setting.

For this project we used the conceptual framework of developing a 'Community of Practice' (CoP) as a touchstone for guiding and evaluating the process of facilitating practice research placements in the field.

Communities of Practice: An overview of key ideas

Developing a 'community' to generate knowledge creation was inspired by recognition of the powerful impact derived from situated learning. In this context

situated learning refers to knowledge development grounded in site specific work, where learning is characterised as a social phenomenon. From this perspective changes in student perception, cognition, language, learning and sense of personal agency are all influenced by engagement with others, while carrying out authentic workplace activities within a milieu of negotiated social interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using this paradigm, learning is conceptualised as a social process derived out of and dependent upon interactions with others. Communities of Practice therefore “are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.4). Wenger et al. have emphasised the organic nature of CoPs to promote learning in classroom, industry and management settings. For the purpose of this project we have been interested in developing an intentional CoP amongst students, field educators, other agency staff and tutors from the outset. Throughout the project we have been mindful that for CoPs to be sustainable care and attention needs to be taken in their creation, development and subsequent evolution, to nurture ownership, leadership and a supporting infrastructure (St-Onge & Wallace, 2003).

Three elements are fundamental to the structure of a functioning community of practice. These include the *domain of knowledge*, that is, the topic the community focuses on. In the case of this project the domain is learning to conduct practice research. The second element of a CoP is the *community*, the group of people engaged in the inquiry process. Interactions between members of the community create the ‘social fabric’ for learning (Barwick, et al. 2009). For this project the community includes the social work students, their field supervisors from social service agencies, the tutors from CPIT and University of Canterbury and a range of other interested people including agency colleagues and managers. *Practice* is the third element integral to a CoP. Practice refers to ‘the set of frameworks, ideas, tools, language, stories and documents shared by the community’ (Le May, 2009:8). Learning to conduct systematic inquiry in the field, required students and field educators to engage with the language of research; become familiar with tools used to gather, organise and disseminate data; and write literature reviews, research proposals and ethics applications.

The peer group tutorials, placement supervision sessions and the final research expo held during December 2011 provided avenues for 'productive inquiry' formal critique and sharing of emergent practice knowledge. The tutorial structure and one off expo helped build an infrastructure to support and sustain the CoP through engagement with the domain of practice research, utilising both formal and informal collaborative peer learning strategies across the nine social service agency settings. As such the structure of the project CoP enabled students to address the potential silo effect of working in individual agencies, and learn from the research activity of peers who were placed in diverse agency settings.

Establishing mechanisms to sustain CoPs, while enabling links to develop within and outside of their structure, is central to facilitating ongoing capacity building in knowledge and skill. In this case the project team were aware from the outset that practice research endeavours undertaken within the three month duration of the student placement needed to include self-contained short term achievable research tasks. To pursue the aim of facilitating ongoing developmental capacity building in the area of agency based research, care was needed to plan the individual research projects into discrete incremental parts that could be addressed through a succession of student placements. Using this strategy enabled realistic research goals to be met during the course of the three month placements, while encouraging sustained engagement with systematic inquiry by field educators over the longer time frame necessary for successful completion of an entire research project. We found ample evidence of careful planning by the project participants to ensure research topics could grow developmentally over time within the agency settings. Findings relating more specifically to the developmental nature of agency research projects can be found on page 23.

Conceptual links have been made between the functioning of successful CoPs, and the development of social, human, organisational, professional, and client capital (Le May, 2009). Student and field educator participants derived a range of benefits from the networking opportunities made available through engagement with both the tutorial structure and via the conduct of individual research projects carried out in agencies. Three of the research projects will contribute to future organisational development and service expansion. Most of the research projects undertaken by participants prompted workforce consultation and participation within agencies,

creating the means to expose knowledge, share learning, problem solve and create change. Two of the projects facilitated corporate memory sharing enabling the capture of previously unrecorded agency history, vulnerable to loss due to staff retirement and turnover. While these activities clearly signal ways in which human and organisational capital have been nurtured through the CoP, there have also been positive contributions made to the development of professional capital within social work, through the generation of 'best practice' ideals emerging from engagement with the research activities.

3. Methodology

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was sought from the human ethics committees and approved by Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology [CPIT] (11th August 2011) and the University of Canterbury [UC] (22nd August 2011).

Field educators and students participating in the research were provided with an information sheet to read that outlined the parameters of the research. Participants then signed the consent form and were advised that they could withdraw their involvement at any time prior to completion of the research. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the report to protect the anonymity of participants.

Recruitment

The first phase of recruitment was to identify possible agencies and field educators to take part in the research project. Each person in the research project team took responsibility for personally visiting a selection of possible placement agencies to discuss the project and to invite field educators interested in supervising a student research placement to a briefing about the project. At this stage, we decided that agencies would have the option of offering placements that were either 100% placement time committed to research or, placement time that was a mixture of practice and research; as long as the time spent completing research tasks was at least 50% of placement time. It was hoped that two students, one from CPIT and one from UC would be placed in each agency. This would provide a supportive environment for students while completing the research placement.

Once agency visits were completed, a briefing session was held on the 26th May 2011 with all interested field educators. The aims of the briefing were, firstly, to outline the scope of Ako Aotearoa, the aims of the project, and the expected outputs and deliverables. Secondly, the briefing was an opportunity to provide field educators with information related to student assessment on a research placement, a schedule for tutorials and liaison visits, and expectations about the types of tasks students would be involved in during a research placement; ensuring the research students are involved in is achievable. Finally, the briefing provided an opportunity to discuss

with field educators possible research projects students could be involved in while on placement. Two field educators at the briefing had previous experience supervising students on research placements and were able to share information about the types of research tasks the students had undertaken.

To assist field educators in the identification of tasks students could be involved in, a breakdown of the research process into research tasks was provided (Appendix A).

Students enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work programmes from CPIT and the University of Canterbury were invited to take part in the research project on the basis that they each identified a desire to learn and to consolidate research knowledge and skills as part of their placement experience. Each of the project team met with students to outline the purpose and deliverables of the Ako Aotearoa research project. Students had a number of responses to conducting research on placement. Responses included concern about not knowing how to do research, enthusiasm at the opportunity to do something different on placement, and concern about the assessment of research work on placement.

Participants

In total nine Christchurch based agencies agreed to take students. Three were statutory agencies and six were non-government organisations. Students participated in a diverse range of research endeavours during placement. In the end, each agency could only take one student (nine students overall). The Christchurch earthquakes meant agencies were involved in earthquake response activities, and some relocated following damage to workplaces. These factors limited the ability of agencies to host students on placement.

Three students were studying with UC and six with CPIT. The participants from CPIT were 2nd and 3rd year students enrolled in the 3 year Bachelor of Social Work degree. The three UC participants were in their final year of a 4 year Bachelor of Social Work degree. Both UC and CPIT students complete two placements during their degree, each of 60 days duration. Four students were completing their first placement and four their second. Both cohorts had completed a research course.

Of the students, eight were female and one was male. The average age of the students was 33 years with 52 being the oldest and 21 the youngest. Of the field

educators six were female, three were male. One student identified as Māori and three as British, and the remainder of students and field educators identified as Pakeha (or New Zealander).

Six of the field educators in the project were women and three were men. All nine were experienced, qualified social workers with over 15 years of experience in the field. All had undertaken some research methods education, but for most this input had occurred many years ago during their social work training. Two out of the nine field educators engaged in this project did have recent experience in undertaking postgraduate research. As such, for seven of the nine field educators re-engagement with research principles and process was necessary to undertake the student supervision during this project. Specific meeting times were offered to field educators during the project to provide research process and technical input.

Data Collection

The research design was a mixed method study including both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The quantitative approach consisted of the use of a pre and post placement survey instrument to measure any difference in levels of confidence with research as a result of the intervention (completing the research placement). The qualitative approach involved analysing student journaling written during the placement, and conducting nine semi-structured interviews with students and eight with field educators. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from participants to gain insight into their experiences about learning to research in an industry placement setting.

Research Confidence Survey

A 28 question survey was completed by the student participants immediately prior to the start of their placement and shortly after completing the placement. The questionnaire (Appendix B & C) was designed to assess the student's confidence with various aspects of being a practitioner-researcher. The questionnaire was pre-tested with six students and minor changes to the question layout made as a result. We were interested in whether the experience of undertaking a research focused placement, and engaging with the supports provided by the academic staff and field educators, would lead to an increased level of confidence with research.

Questionnaires were completed by eight of the nine student participants. Unfortunately one student did not attend the first project meeting and so did not complete a pre-placement questionnaire. The survey was completed anonymously and a unique identifier used so that pre and post questionnaires could be matched. The first six questions collected personal characteristics.

Summary of Survey Questions:

- 19 out of 22 questions used a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) and were used as indicators of confidence with various aspects of research.
- One question asked students to identify the people that they considered part of their network of professional support for research, and this was used as an indicator of whether the student's recognition of their network increased during the placement.
- One question asked students to list as many research designs as they could and was intended to be used as an indicator of whether their knowledge about research designs increased during the placement. Unfortunately this question proved unsuccessful because participants did not complete the question thoroughly and in the same manner pre and post placement. It is assumed that students found this question required more concentration and thinking than the rest of the questionnaire and so answered in a manner consistent with their energy and enthusiasm at the time of completion. Some students were more diligent with the pre-placement than the post-placement questionnaire and so it appeared their knowledge of research design decreased. This meant that the apparent increase in knowledge by other students could not be treated as reliable as this result could also be due to variation in energy, enthusiasm or diligence. This question has therefore been excluded from the analysis.
- The final remaining question was qualitative in nature and asked about the student's assessment of the impact of the placement on their learning about placement.

Student Journaling

Student journaling enables students through a process of critical thinking to deepen their own understanding of personal learning using a process of structured reflection (Liuoliene & Metiuniene 2009). Students undertook a reflective journaling process using a journaling template developed by the research project team (Appendix D). The purpose of the journals was three-fold. The journal entries formed part of the project evaluation process; journal entries enabled students to critically reflect on their experience of undertaking research tasks on placement; and finally, students used the journal entries in supervision with their field educators.

Tutorial Support

Fry, Ketteridge, and Marshall (2009 p.74) state that in small group learning, such as the tutorial, “students are engaged ... both as learners and as collaborators in their own intellectual, personal and professional development”. Students are able to use tutorial groups as a vehicle for reflection about the discipline under study (Goodlad & Hirst 1989), and are able to develop, from the tutoring process, a range of strategies for dealing with research challenges encountered on placement.

Throughout the course of placement students attended up to four tutorials held on 9th August, 13th September, 26 September and 13th October. The tutorials were not compulsory but students were strongly encouraged to attend. In the first tutorial group students briefed the group about the research activity they were undertaking on placement. The purpose of the tutorial was to make explicit connections between social work practice and the research process, to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the two methods. During the second and third tutorials students gave presentations about their research project, seeking critical feedback from peers and prompting tutorial discussion. These discussions were linked with research principles, ethics and problem solving in relation to conducting practice research. The final tutorial included reflection on being part of the project, feedback about lessons learned and discussion related to heightened student appreciation of the connection between research and practice; commonly known as ‘research-mindedness’ (Everitt, Hardiker, Littlewood, & Mullender, 1992). The relationship between research and social work practice is captured by Evans, Hardy and Shaw (2010):

Research-minded practitioners will... treat their work as though research and practice are not separate, mapping research techniques across the social work process. As such, they will be better able to articulate the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives which underpin their actions, use these to make sense of situations, people and behaviour, and further develop theory in practice” (p.82).

Field educators attended a tutorial on the 26th September 2011. While the group that attended was small, the tutorial provided participants an opportunity to comment on the learning achieved as a result of supervising student research placements. Participants made suggestions about strategies to enhance research learning on placement.

Field Educator and Student Interviews

The primary sources of data were the field educators and students involved in the research placements. Semi structured audio interviews were conducted with field educators and students post the completion of each research placement. The semi structured interview consisted of 12 questions (Appendix E & F). Interviews were conducted in a range of settings at a time suitable to each participant. The interviews took place over a two month period beginning as students completed placement during October and continuing through to December 2011. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed by an independent person. Once transcribed the interviews were returned to the research team member who then analysed the transcripts using thematic analysis.

Field Educator and Student Film Interviews

From November 2011 through to the end of January 2012 most students and field educators involved in the project were interviewed and filmed. The intention was to use the edited filmed interviews to develop a video resource for research teaching and fieldwork research placement supervision. This second round of interviewing provided further information about the experiences of students and field educators in relation to learning and teaching practice research in the field.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Interview data from both the audio and film interviews was analysed using a process of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis does not fit with any particular qualitative method but rather is a process for analysing and interpreting information and is used across a range of qualitative methods. It is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clark 2006 p.79). Thematic analysis was chosen for this study as there are few studies on applied social work research in industry settings and thematic analysis is a flexible tool allowing for the identification of unexpected themes (Braun & Clark 2006).

Braun and Clark’s (2006) phases of thematic analysis were used to guide the data analysis process. Phase one is *becoming familiar with the data* and involved reading the interview transcripts and making general notes alongside each transcript. In the second phase of *developing initial codes* the data was organised into meaningful groups that related to the research question “fostering and supporting collaborative teaching and learning of applied social work research skills”. This phase is where the researcher identifies “the most basic segment or element, of raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p.63). Aspects in the transcription that helped understand student and field educator views, experiences and perceptions about collaborative teaching and learning on research placements were identified. These initial categories are listed in Appendix G. Phase three involved a *search for themes* where the analysis was refocused and the previously identified codes were identified in to themes. This phase facilitates consideration of how the different codes fit together in an overarching theme. In phase four *theme revision* occurred. The final phase of the thematic analysis was to *define and name themes* where a detailed analysis about each theme was written.

Research Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have used the term ‘trustworthiness’ to describe the overall quality of the qualitative research outcomes. They identify four criterion that make up trustworthiness; these are, credibility, transferability, auditability, and confirmability.

Credibility relates to the degree that the research findings represent the descriptions provided by research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve credibility researchers need to manage the distortion of the data collected by the subjective views of the researcher known as research bias; and manage the impact of the researcher on the setting and participant under study, known as research reactivity (Baumgarten, 2012). To reduce bias and reactivity we engaged in a process of reflexivity, both individually and as a research team, where we discussed the research process and our involvement and potential influence at each stage. In addition, the research team, at our regular meetings, discussed the different and similar perspectives about the experience of placement research described in the transcripts. We were mindful of our roles as social work educators of the students and professional colleagues of the field educators, who each took part in the research.

Another strategy used to enhance credibility was the collection of data from multiple sources, and by multiple researchers. Audio and video interviews were conducted by each of the researchers using the same guiding questions. This process, known as triangulation, is intended to achieve completion or 'exhaustedness' in relation to the research questions (Padgett, 2008). The process of conducting multiple interviews also allowed us to gain 'thick description', or deep, detailed accounts of the experience of conducting and supervising research on placement. Detailed, thick descriptions provided by the research participants assists with *transferability*; the "process in which the researcher and the readers *infer* how the findings might relate to other situations" (Denscombe, 2009 , p.189). In addition, the Social Work practice research expo provided Social Workers, researchers, and students the opportunity to hear about the research process, and student/agency research work on placement. The research report and expo provide listeners and readers are then able to decide for themselves if the research findings are able to be transferred to other settings. In this way, consumers of the research information are not passive recipients but are engaged in evaluating and determining the relevance of research findings (Denscombe, 2009).

Finally, *auditability* is the extent to which documentation is kept throughout the research project so that others can clearly follow the research process used. Auditability has been achieved through the production of this research report,

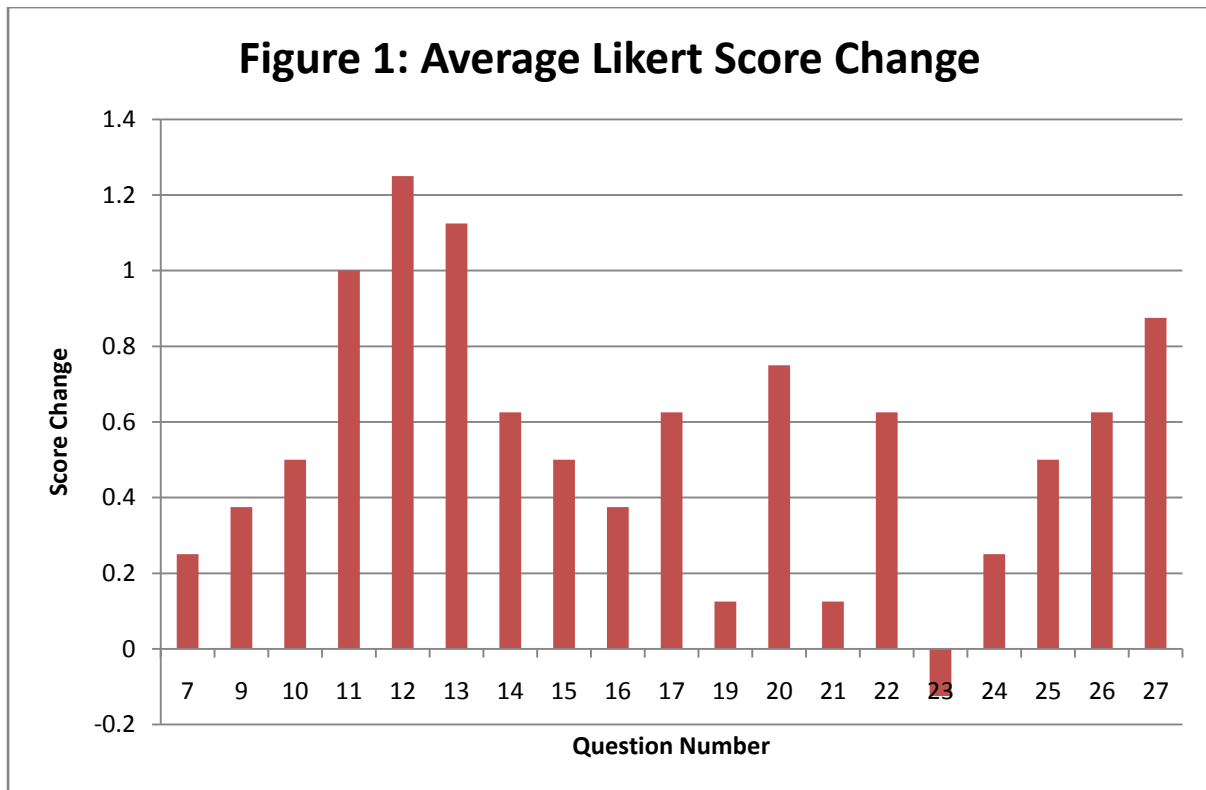
supported by extensive research field notes kept by each of the researchers, research transcripts, and meeting research notes.

4. Findings

Research Confidence Survey

All scores from the 19 Likert scale questions in the pre and post-placement survey (See Appendix B and C) were aggregated to produce an overall confidence score for each student. The mean pre-test confidence score was 3.44 across all items and the standard deviation was 0.52. All but one student fell within the upper or lower limit of one standard deviation. It is therefore reasonable to draw the conclusion that regardless of their age, gender, institution or stage in their studies, the students were not more or less confident with research prior to their placement. This is somewhat surprising since some of the participants (2) were in the final year of a four year degree programme whilst others were in the second (4) or third (2) year of a three year degree. It would be reasonable to assume that the students had received different amounts of in-class teaching regarding research, had completed different assignments and would therefore be more confident with research if they had completed more years of study. Whilst the results indicate a small increase in confidence correlating to the number of years of study completed, the variation was not significant as these fell within one standard deviation of the mean of all results. Our findings would suggest that despite variations in years of study, the students felt no more confident overall about undertaking a piece of practice research. The same calculation was undertaken with the post placement results and this revealed an average confidence score of 4.03 indicating that overall the students were more confident with research following the placement. Once again the standard deviation was calculated as (0.72) and this revealed no significant differences in confidence between the students based on any of the personal characteristics included in the survey.

The results from the 19 individual Likert scale questions were aggregated to compare the pre and post placement scores across the sample of students. The results of this comparison are summarised in Figure 1.



Particular attention was paid to those questions where the average movement was over 0.5 points on the Likert scale, either positively or negatively. The results of comparing the pre and post placement scores suggested that following a research focused placement, students reported feeling more confident about how to:

1. undertake a service or programme evaluation (1.00);
2. undertake a small scale research (1.25);
3. use secondary research data to inform their practice (1.13);
4. identify ethical considerations in research (0.63);
5. identify research questions that support the work of a social work agency (0.63);
6. write a research proposal (0.75);
7. write a literature review (0.63);
8. present the findings of a research project in writing (0.63) and orally (0.88).

These results are unsurprising in that the areas in which student confidence particularly increased correlate to the practical research tasks that the students were engaged with during their placement. Most of the individual projects were at a beginning stage and therefore the students were involved in clarifying the research question so that it would address the concerns of the agency and then writing the

research proposal and literature review. These tasks required the students to access prior research findings but also to engage with both secondary data and prior research that was available in the agency. All students were also asked to present their work at a research expo at the end of their placement and to report on their achievements and findings to date. There appears to be a correlation between the research tasks the students engaged with and their level of confidence. Indeed the one question that indicated a small negative result related to confidence with quantitative data analysis. None of the students had any significant experience of quantitative data analysis during their placement and their level of confidence post placement indicates this lack of practical experience. Our findings suggest that practical engagement with research tasks has a positive impact on confidence levels and therefore work integrated research learning would be a beneficial supplement to class based teaching and learning.

The results from the question related to the network of professional support were aggregated for all students to compare the number of supports identified pre and post placement. The mean score pre placement was 3.4 and post placement was 4.4 individuals. This indicates that overall the students involved in the research placements were able to identify additional people who could provide professional support for their research. Although the average increase was only one additional person, the range was quite small (1 lowest to 5 highest) and therefore the increase would have been significant for the students. One objective of the project was to build a community of practice related to practice research, and this finding indicates that students did indeed develop their awareness of the supports available within that community.

The final anonymous qualitative question provided support for the quantitative findings. Students indicated their increased level of confidence with research:

“The placement has helped me feel more confident in undertaking research; seeing its value and place in practice; that it can be very rewarding and useful; and that with the right tools and support that anyone can undertake some part if not all of a research project.” Student 8

“The placement has given me the confidence and realisation that research can be conducted within a statutory organisation.” Student 1

Students also indicated that they had developed confidence with specific skills related to the research process:

“It’s taught me a lot about engaging with material - how to collect relevant literature and focus on the key points.” Student 2

“I definitely learnt how to look for information and to form a literature review. I also have more of an idea how the research process works.” Student 4

One student also specifically mentioned the theory/practice nexus and the value of supplementing class based learning with work integrated learning:

“Theoretical knowledge has been integrated and internalised which has given depth and greater understanding of the knowledge I brought to placement.” Student 3

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative questions included in the research confidence questionnaire suggest that practical engagement with research tasks increases student confidence with research. Although class based teaching and learning is important, it does not appear that variations in the amount or content of that more theoretical learning has a significant impact on confidence levels when it comes to actually engaging with a research project. Findings from this project indicate that if class based learning is complemented by work integrated learning opportunities focused on research tasks then student confidence increases. It is anticipated that this improvement in confidence is likely to increase the probability of new graduates engaging in practice research. However, further enquiry is required to investigate this possibility.

Interviews

Establishing a research agenda for practicum education

From our interviews it was evident that eight out of the nine industry settings took care to plan their research agenda to include incremental developmental progress over a period of several student placements. This developmental model had been suggested by the project team from the outset. We wanted to ensure there were realistic expectations within the agency settings of what one student could achieve during a fourteen week placement, while at the same time build capacity for future research student involvement in the same agency settings. This model enables a

degree of practice research expertise to be developed over time by the field educator, while progress could be made towards the completion of a significant piece of research. This process was intended to raise awareness and acceptance of the practice research placement option with both agency staff and the student populations. We believe this developmental model is integral to both the success and future sustainability of the practice research placements. Below are samples of comments drawn from the interviews that demonstrate both acceptance and adoption of the developmental model during the course of the placements:

“We looked into structuring the whole research process from start to finish so that we had a grounding for the next student coming along...so this is what you’ve got to do, and then the next person, this is what they can do...” (Lesley, Student).

“I am hopeful that with another student we can move forward to finish the literature review and we should hopefully have enough raw data to begin a bit of data analysis...” (Jason, Field Educator).

“So the student was able to do a literature review and was able to produce a discussion document that really defines the topic, explains the issues and for me, has informed the next step....So it would be good to have another student now to go out and do the next step, which is the information we want...” (Jill, Field Educator).

These excerpts show how students and field educators were mindful of breaking down large scale projects into achievable stages to fit the placement timeframe. These comments also indicate the willingness of field educators to continue with the model and offer future students practice research placements.

The Learning Experience

While good planning was essential to enable large scale topics to be managed over a number of placements, our key concern in developing this project was to promote student learning in relation to doing practice research. Evidence exists on a number of levels that learning for each student was varied, in-depth, rich and for the most part enjoyable. The following comments are a small sample of many we have collected about the student learning experience...

“I learned that it’s (research) not linear, it’s pretty messy...Learning how to write a survey was quite exciting. Because the first one took me ages and when I did the trial, lots of scribbles came back to me, just a rephrasing, or reword this, you know, which was really helpful...But with the second survey I had more of an idea and I felt more confident in phrasing simple

questions and formatting it so it is easy to read...and with the literature review also, no, it's something I haven't done before." (Christine, Student).

"I learnt that it's (practice research) doable. That it was doable and it's not as big and scary as social workers make out...I assumed it would be that if you're a social worker conducting research you're kind of cast out there into the wilderness where it's not. There's so many good resources out there to help you complete and conduct the research you want to, so that was huge learning for me." (Lesley, Student).

"It was quite exciting to actually get the responses in and know that people were interested to participate and for me I felt really good to be able to analyse it and see the commonalities...you are learning as you go, which is good." (Sally, Student).

"They (tutors) lined up the social work process and the research process and showed how they fitted with each other and that really helped my understanding." (Alison, Student).

"I think for me the best thing was... because I didn't know anything about eating disorders... so I think the research helped me to be able to understand the patients..." (Mary, Student).

The Communities of Practice model used to ground the project made us aware of the importance of creating spaces for peer learning between the students. Four tutorial sessions were held during the course of the placement to bring students together who were working across the different agency settings. Some of these sessions were structured with tasks the students needed to complete and present at the tutorial. Other sessions were more informal and work agendas were developed out of the presenting issues that students brought on the day.

"I think also the tutorials as well, and being able to listen to other people... Like I learned heaps from the other students and what they had to say and how they were going about their literature reviews really helped me to start one... I think knowing what other people and how other people were approaching their research helped me determine how I should approach my research." (Meg, Student).

"Just being able to have people work through the issues with you, like go around and if you're having problems with something, put it up on the board and brainstorm ideas, even if you didn't use them, it's sort of like one point stuck out and you can go in that direction." (Alison, Student).

"...it felt like you weren't on your own- students were facing the same, similar issues, similar road blocks. So it was good to hear other ways and it kind of gave you that little bit more motivation...when you hear everyone else's presentation then sometimes a light bulb would go off, which was great!" (Sally, Student).

At the completion of their placements most students were excited about what they were able to learn and achieve. Nevertheless, during the course of conducting research on placement students did encounter a range of challenges.

Challenges in conducting practice research

The challenges experienced by students were of a varied nature. Several experienced a sense of isolation in conducting research in busy practice based agencies, and struggled to gain a sense of legitimacy about researching rather than engaging in direct practice...

“I was very much in an isolated role so I found that quite difficult...I think because of the whole physical environment, the set-up of the whole building...so there were times when I’d finish at the end of the day and I’d go to say ‘Cheerio’ and there was no one actually in the building.” (Lisa, Student).

“It was kind of lonely like you’d spend a lot of time in the office by yourself. Also I felt like I had to keep justifying to people – I think other staff members didn’t think I was doing anything because I wasn’t actually out there working with the patients and so they kept asking me if I had enough to do, and I’m like ‘Yep’, I really do.” (Malinda, Student).

“A lot of them (social workers) would kind of glaze over when you mention research. If they asked what you were doing and you said looking at suicide, they wouldn’t really know where to go with it. Some of them weren’t even aware of what you did to research-what you actually had to do. I think their perception was ‘its best left to someone else...” (Sally, Student).

The comments above speak to the rationale for developing this project. Existing low levels of research literacy or interest in research amongst qualified social workers means there is a significant gap in social work educational outcomes and practice efficacy. From this set of experiences we discovered how critical it was that other agency workers be briefed about the topic and purpose of the research the student was undertaking. Where this briefing did not happen, students were more likely to experience isolation and loss of legitimacy.

Students and field educators did encounter other sorts of challenges during the placement. For both, negotiating some space within the supervision process to address research concerns was a major hurdle, but once addressed became a management strategy for facilitating good progress on the research.

“Time is always a critical factor so we kind of split-we developed a second supervision session during the week that was just research specific...they (supervision sessions) normally went for one hour fifteen minutes, and it really wasn’t enough time to digest all the stuff that needed to be digested within the clinical work, let alone the research work as well. So at the start of the week we had research supervision, at the end of the week we had clinical supervision. Because even though it (the research component of the placement) might only be 30%, if it’s a new thing to the placement and a new thing to the student and a new thing to the supervisor, it actually takes up as much space in discussion and headspace as doing the clinical or other parts of the placement...” (Jason, Field Educator).

An unexpected hurdle for students to negotiate was the lack of interest and overt negativity expressed from class peers about completing a research placement.

“When I was looking for peer support I was getting a lot of negative from fellow students about what I was actually doing...their perceptions were quite negative so it sort of rained on my parade a bit...” (Lisa, Student).

“Certainly a lot of my classmates were sort of like, why are you doing a research placement, or even, yeah some social workers I talked to about it...they were like oh, so your research placement, why did you get the stink placement?” (Christine, Student).

“Everyone was like, ‘Oh yuk, you’re doing a research placement – why would you wanna do more research?’” (Alison, Student).

This degree of peer negativity did impact on how students approached their placements, as one student commented...

“I’d bought in to my peers basically, bought into that [quieter voice:] ‘oh God, research – what are you going to get out of research [Lesley]?’ and all that kind of stuff. And I just completely bought into that and I didn’t allow myself to go in there with a fresh mind and just sort of step back and see what was going to come of it.” (Lesley, Student).

These sorts of reactions to research are not limited to a New Zealand social work student cohort. Similar reactions to these amongst students have been noted in other countries. A recent Canadian study on social work student attitudes towards research found that ‘students described elevated levels of anxiety and less positive attitudes when classmates were persistently negative about research classes’ (Morgenshtern et al, 2011: 564). Certainly it would seem from the conversations had with students participating in this project, peer comments did impact on their sense of accomplishment and learning legitimacy during the placement.

Impact

Already within the context of the Research Excellence Framework in the United Kingdom (U.K.) it is necessary to show the impact of systematic inquiry in the social services (Parker & van Teijlingen, 2012) to justify expenditure, and demonstrate accountability and research quality. While these demands are evident within the current New Zealand Performance Based Research Funding (PBRF) exercise, they have yet to be applied in the fashion witnessed in the U.K. Even so, we were mindful of gleaning from students and supervisors what some of the impacts of the research practicum project might have been for student learning (as noted above) and social service agencies. The following comments provide insights on the question of the impacts of facilitating the research placements.

Adding to agency research capacity:

“...just the huge amount of work (done) was the first benefit. I mean the amount of hours, was it 480 hours, or something? That’s huge. If we had to quantify that into a staff FTE, you know, what an enormous benefit to the organisation...it just keeps the momentum going constantly. I thought it was really beneficial having a social work student because it just brings a different language and perspective to the (research) planning stage and communication stage, and when she’s connecting with the other workers, because she is almost like one of them and it’s something they can all relate to, being a social work student...” (Silvia, Field Educator).

Contributing to organisational learning, policy and funding initiatives:

“I mean it hugely increases the capacity because a lot of agencies simply couldn’t afford to have a research position, but if they can engage a student with good support, they will find themselves in a really good position to be both learning from what they are doing, but also then better able to articulate that when they are trying to influence funders and policy makers...” (Vince, Field Educator).

Developing practice evaluation:

“I phoned pretty much every (Type of agency) service throughout New Zealand and every (Type of agency) that conducts or offers family therapy and none of them have an evaluation tool...” (Lesley, Student).

Addressing knowledge gaps:

“Not a lot of indigenous youth justice programs have been researched, so they just needed as much research as possible...” (Shirley, Student).

“I could see the research we were doing was really beneficial because it wasn’t something that had kind of been looked at...” (Mary, Student).

“..and the assumption was that ‘Oh yep, at least others would be using some tools – pre and post measures around a piece of work with a family, but there was actually none...” (Jason, Field Educator).

Making a difference in the lives of clients:

“I had a chance to meet with one of the younger people with dementia. He got really emotional and I thought, “Well, that’s powerful.”... that we are doing something that is making a difference and that was pretty big for me...” (Alison, Student).

Promoting research literacy and interest amongst social services:

“...and I think because CPIT’s [Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology] involved with Ako Aotearoa, that sort of led us to being involved in that presentation day you had last week (research Expo). I think it prompted us to have our own research day which we thought went really well and gave us introductions to several folk that we hadn’t had too close a contact with in the past. So I just think that sort of thing has also come out of the project...” (Vince, Field Educator).

Planning future service delivery:

“...our key areas of interest in terms of providing an ongoing service in the community when we don’t really know what that service is going to look like (this is post-earthquake)...So we need some clarity in our mind so that we can put a proposal forward to our funders and national office...” (Simon, Field Educator).

Informing practice and professional education:

I think that coming out of the survey that we did, there is limited knowledge of what social workers knew about the risks, what led young people and children to attempt suicide, and a lot of the risks that were in there correlate to just about every child that has been through (name of the agency) but I don’t think that social workers really realise the impact...one of my recommendations was that social workers be given some information...of what the risk factors are and what questions they can ask...exciting...to know that you had a part in changing the system here.” (Sally, Student).

Documenting agency history:

“... and both of those, like both the psychiatrists that I’m referring to are a year, maybe two years away from retirement and then the information’s gone...” (Lesley, Student).

“...the third project was to do an oral history of the (agency) counsellors’ experiences, personal experiences and practice experiences of the earthquakes...” (Lisa, Student).

The comments above do not by any means cover all of the different types of impacts noted in the interviews with participants, or foreshadow any of the future developments that might arise from the research conducted to date. These comments do however, show the diverse ways in which the project and the research developed by the students influenced outcomes. The scope of our current project has not enabled us to quantify levels of these impacts in any way.

Readers of this report are likely to be interested in some of the practical factors both students and field educators noted as being critical for a successful research placement to occur. The interviews contained many ideas to take into account. These ideas have been summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Practical Strategies for Facilitating Research Placements

| Issue | Strategy |
|--|---|
| <i>Creating a research environment in the agency</i> | Enable ready access to computer and internet Brief agency team about having a research student and the nature of the project prior to the placement beginning Provide regular updates to the team on research progress and implications for practice Timetable slots for the student to work at home or library if agency environment unsuitable |
| <i>Field Educator Role</i> | Be clear from the outset about what the project entails and the question being addressed Set achievable research goals taking account the duration of the placement Schedule regular research supervision times with the student Help student ‘quarantine’ research time if a mix of practice and research is occurring on placement Develop a research timetable and involve student in regular planning and research organisation |

| Issue | Strategy |
|---|---|
| <i>Field Educator Role cont</i> | <p>Encourage the student to connect with other research resources within or outside of your agency</p> <p>Provide regular feedback to the student about their progress with research tasks</p> <p>Encourage the student to maintain contact with peers who are also completing research placements</p> <p>Make contact with the tertiary institution if problems arise or advice re: research process needed</p> |
| <i>Student Role</i> | <p>Be prepared for the placement by being familiar with the research process, revising research methods notes and familiarising self with the research topic offered</p> <p>Be open to the learning in regards to the research topic on offer</p> <p>Plan from the beginning how to complete the tasks by the end of placement. Develop a research timeline with the supervisor</p> <p>Problem solve research challenges in supervision and with peers</p> <p>Take initiative to inform others in the agency about the research being done, and seek opportunities to present material near the end of placement</p> <p>Attend all research tutorials that might be held in conjunction with the placement</p> <p>Keep in touch with other students conducting practice research on placement</p> |
| <i>Role of the Tertiary Institution</i> | <p>Brief field educators and students about the discrete tasks and learning involved in conducting a research placement</p> <p>Help scope the research project to ensure placement tasks are achievable</p> <p>Articulate clearly how the research placement will be assessed</p> <p>Provide forums for support to both students and field educators to share experiences together</p> <p>Be accessible to help with problem solving should challenges in the research process arise</p> |

| Issue | Strategy |
|---|---|
| <i>Role of the Tertiary Institution cont.</i> | Provide resources for both students and field educators to help with conducting the research ie. Reference lists, venues for meetings, research dissemination opportunities |

During the interviews both students and field educators talked about their experience of being part of the project as well as the future they saw for developing practice research in the future. It was evident that several participants derived a significant sense of accomplishment and enjoyment through their participation...

“...she(the student) was suitably anxious...but when she got into it she was thrilled at having the opportunity of being able to sit down and look at something that was important to her and became even more so. She could see the links with the people we work with.” (Sophie, Field Educator).

“...It’s been enjoyable, it’s been mind-stretching, it’s been good to have the support of the University...” (Jill, Field Educator).

“...but this research project...I couldn’t coast. I had to sort of step up and that was good for me and I think I’ll be finishing my degree with a good sense of achievement in regards to that...” (Lesley, Student).

And this from a student who had not been keen to do a research placement...

“...to be honest I really enjoyed it. I found the time went quick because I was interested in it and because it’s also quite self-directed...you get interested through doing it...and a lot of research is about talking to people, which social workers do every day...” (Sally, Student).

The potential for practice research was summed up by this field educator who was reflecting on how research might play a role in the future agency development

“I think as a health service we do stuff and we do it- sometimes we don’t ask why we do it...we just kinda do it...so I guess the idea of how we can do the business and can we do it differently and are there better ways to do it...that’s always in the back of my mind...I think there’s the potential for just more and more of it (research) to happen and I think it’s probably a question within the likes of a service here, how do you grow that – where it becomes a part of what you do, rather than an ‘as well as’...” (Jason, Field Educator).

Practice Research Field Education Model

A particular approach to developing and supporting the research focused field placements was adopted in this project. Having analysed both the quantitative and

qualitative data, we reflected on the set of components that had constituted this approach, or model of practice research field education, since this would be important to consider if similar projects were being attempted in other locations. Although the scope of this research did not allow for an analysis of whether any particular components of the model were more or less critical to the outcomes that were achieved, we are of the opinion that each element was equally important. Each part of the model is viewed as being integrated within the whole and plays an important role in enabling the whole to function. If other professionals attempted to establish research focused field education placements without paying due attention to the elements contained in this model then the outcome may be drastically different to what was seen in this project. By explicitly stating what we believe the components of the model to be, it is hoped that colleagues will be able to make informed decisions about the design of their own projects on the basis of what was learnt in this research.

The model used in this project contains six interlocking components; drivers, stakeholders, obstacles, agenda and theory, critical inputs, and outputs. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of how these components work together.

Drivers

A key driver in this project was the graduate profile for the Bachelor of Social Work which includes clear expectations that students develop knowledge and skills about conducting research. The academics involved in the project all had a professional interest in field education and work integrated learning and were therefore committed to using practical experience as a pedagogical approach to teaching research knowledge and skills. The academics were also engaged in their own research agenda and therefore prepared to invest time in making the individual projects involved in this enquiry a success.

The field educators involved in the project were selected because of their own interest in research. Two field educators were employed within organisations that had an on-going research agenda, the others were interested in developing one. All the field educators and agencies were interested in developing evidence for practice or in improving their services. Projects were selected that would add value to the work of the agency and would therefore be likely to have on-going support.

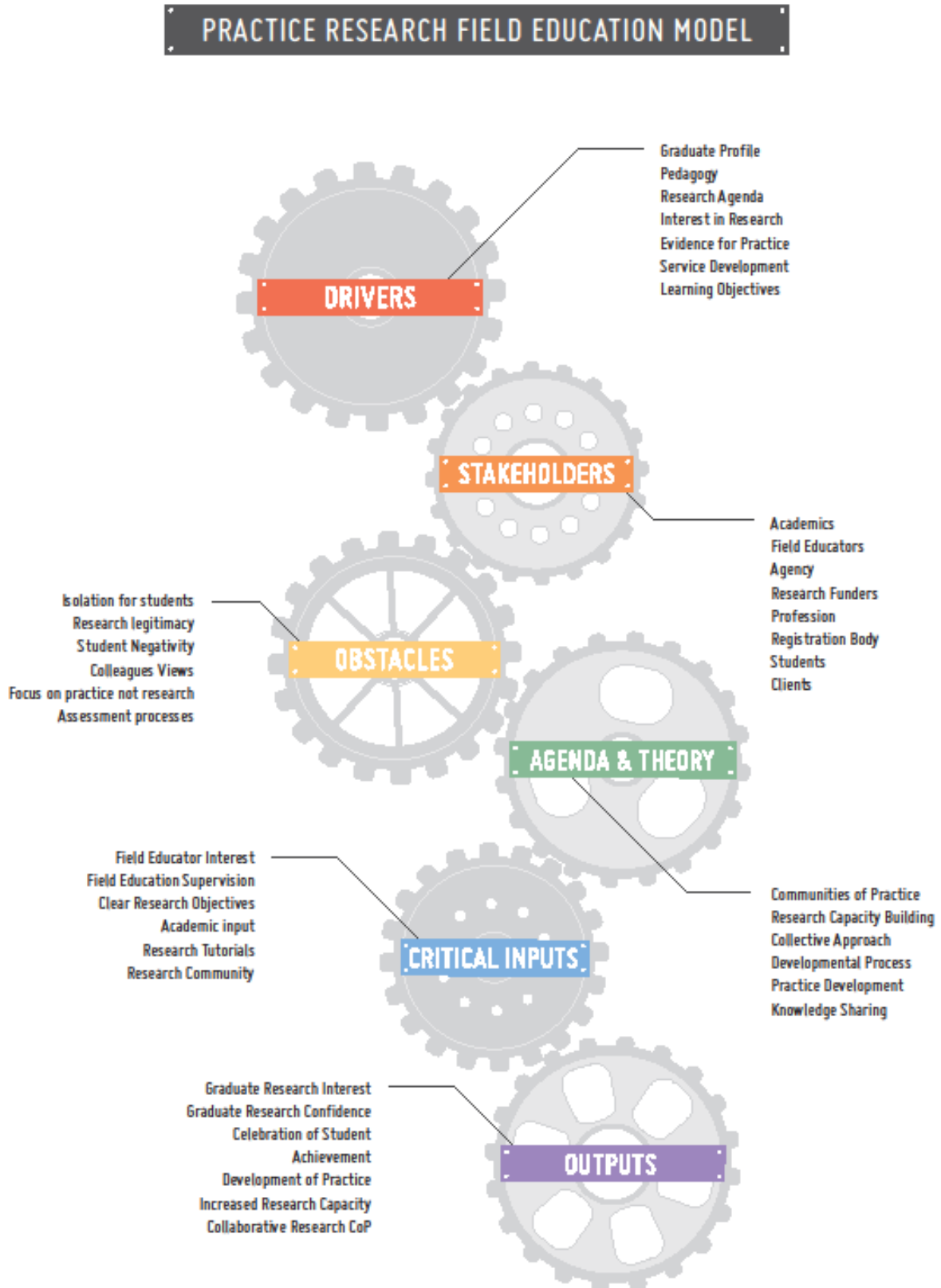


Figure 2: Practice Research Field Education Model

The students involved in this project were selected because they had demonstrated an aptitude or interest in research. All the students were required to develop learning objectives for their placement that included aspects related to research knowledge and skills.

Although the key participants in this project had different drivers for taking part, all were to one degree or another interested in research and committed to the success of the project. Without this shared motivation and commitment to success the project outcomes may not have been realised. This is an important consideration as it may be tempting to replicate the model by imposing it on a group of professionals as a good practice approach. However, implementing research focused placements with academics, field educators or students who are reluctant participants would be a likely recipe for failure.

Stakeholders

This project was undertaken in a collaborative way with a number of stakeholders. The project began through collaboration between two academic institutions that were both seeking placements in the same city. Despite a history of working independently, at the time of this project there was an increasing interest in working collaboratively. At the same time, an historical lack of research partnerships between social service agencies and academic institutions was being questioned in favour of consideration of how respective objectives might be achieved through joint projects. This approach was extended to consider the various objectives of funding bodies such as Ako Aotearoa, the professional social work association, registration body, students, and indeed the clients of social workers. Without willingness to partner and collaborate, some of the individual research projects undertaken by students in this study are unlikely to have been started, let alone been as successful as they were. The project was focused on a broader agenda than simply providing work integrated learning opportunities for students; the agenda of the students and academic institutions. The project was also concerned with building a local research culture to improve service delivery and the capacity for practice research in local social service agencies; the agenda of funders, social work organisations, and professional bodies, ultimately for the benefit of clients.

Obstacles

A number of obstacles to the success of the research placements have been identified through the analysis of the interviews with students and field educators. Whilst these might be viewed as barriers, they also presented opportunities because of the belief that we had in the importance of practice research and the connections with more traditional ideas about social work practice. Some students felt isolated, experienced negativity from other students or colleagues in the agency and doubted that the research tasks they were undertaking constituted legitimate social work practice. The focus of the placement agency and of the assessment processes was on direct client practice and this created challenges for the students and field educators involved in research. However, we highlighted to the participants the value and legitimacy of their research work and modelled a resilient attitude that was focused on overcoming obstacles. We encouraged students and field educators to find solutions to the barriers and view the experiences as opportunities for learning.

Agenda and Theory

As has been declared, we drew on theoretical ideas about situated learning and CoP in undertaking this research (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). We also had a particular agenda to build local research capacity and to work collectively with social service agencies to use research to develop practice. The projects were established on the basis of a developmental approach with the intention that future students would undertake further work on the same projects to assist the agencies to carry the projects to completion. As part of building the local research agenda we also placed an emphasis on sharing knowledge and organised the research expo so that students, field educators, and agencies could publicise the work that had been undertaken and share the outcomes of the projects.

Critical Inputs

The research placements in this project were undertaken with field educators who had an interest in research and were prepared to provide supervision to students that would focus on research and not just practice. We worked with field educators in the early stages of the project to define clear and achievable research objectives that would not place unrealistic expectations on students. The focus on developing a

research CoP meant that field educators had access to advice from academics about conducting their practice research and tutorials were provided to support the students in the research tasks they were undertaking.

Outputs

The unique set of drivers in this project, the collaboration, partnership and approach to obstacles, combined with the agenda, theoretical ideas and the input provided to field educators and students, led to some positive outputs from the project. These included an increase in interest and confidence with research for students and a celebration of their achievements in relation to research tasks. The projects undertaken by students led to the development of practice and an increase in the local capacity for practice research. The project also saw the development of a collaborative community of practice focused on social work research. It is our belief that these outputs were achieved because of the integration of the particular components of the model described here. If one aspect of the model is changed then this will result in the whole system operating quite differently, or indeed failing to operate as intended. Colleagues setting out to achieve similar outcomes should give careful consideration to how to incorporate the same elements of the model described here. However, it is also important to recognise that the ingredients in our model are unique to the particular time and place of our project. Whilst colleagues may set out to achieve similar outcomes, the unique features of their time and place may lead to variations from the outcomes seen in our project.

Methodological Limitations

Although the primary aim of the research has been achieved, the methodology has some limitations. Firstly, for a number of reasons the research was conducted with a smaller number of participants than anticipated; nine students and nine agencies (field educators) participated in the practice research project. Factors contributing to this included the limited time frame in which to organise research placements created by the events of the Christchurch earthquakes beginning in February 2011. A second impact on the number of research placements was related to the agencies themselves. Originally it had been anticipated that it would be possible to have six placement agencies involved with the project each with two students, one from UC and one from CPIT. However, it became clear that many agencies felt unable to take

two students, partly as a result of the earthquake activity, and so students were placed individually. Ultimately nine agencies took individual students on placement. Future studies into practice research field education would benefit from including a larger number of participants.

The second limitation is that this project was restricted to Christchurch, the location of the two tertiary providers conducting the study. This limitation and the small number of participants mean that the findings cannot be generalised to social work students undertaking research placements in other areas of New Zealand.

A further limitation we were mindful of from the outset was that due to the scope of project and evaluation it has not been possible to *quantify* in any real sense the impact on students, agencies and community of conducting the practice research in industry settings. We have qualitative data that speaks to a diverse range of impacts that can be viewed on pages 23-32. Even so these impacts have not been subject to any form of systematic measurement.

Limitations are also evident in the quantitative data. Of the nine students, only eight completed both the pre and post-placement surveys. One student was absent from the first meeting and did not complete a survey and so her data was excluded since her post-placement survey could not be compared with a pre-placement survey. Unfortunately, most of the field educators also did not complete surveys despite being sent the questionnaire. A total of three surveys were completed by field educators but only one could be matched both pre and post-placement. It was therefore decided to exclude the field educator survey data, which meant that it was not possible to determine whether there were changes in the confidence of field educators in conducting research as a result of participating in the project. We see this as a significant gap in the data because it is reasonable to anticipate that field educators gained confidence as well as students through undertaking practice research with the support of academic colleagues.

5. Project Outputs

The *Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field* project resulted in a number of outputs that celebrated the results of 2011 social work research placements, and will contribute to the development of student and field educator learning and teaching in future social work research placements. The outputs are;

Social Work Practice Research Expo

Following completion of the research placements, a research expo was hosted at CPIT and local educators and practitioners were invited to hear about the work conducted during the individual projects. Eight out of the nine students involved in the project presented at the expo. Seven of the students presented their work jointly with their field educator. This event was an opportunity for students, with the support of field educators, to showcase their practice research, key findings, and key learning that resulted from undertaking the research placement. Hosting the expo was intended to model the need to disseminate information and findings from research initiatives, while providing an opportunity for additional community agencies and tertiary institution staff to engage with the project. A total of 17 agencies were represented at the expo and the social work professional body, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) was also in attendance. A further two agencies have offered to host practice research placements during 2012 due to attendance at the expo.

Publication and Dissemination

In 2011 we published an article;

Maidment, J., Chilvers, D., Crichton-Hill, Y. and Meadows-Taurua, K. (2011) Promoting research literacy during the social work practicum. *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work – Review Edition*, 23(4), 3-13.

This article discussed the reasons why social work students and graduates appear to have little motivation for undertaking research. The paper also reported on the phases of the *Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field* project. Two further articles on different aspects of the project are currently being written.

One member of the project team has had an abstract accepted to do a presentation about the project at the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) national conference during November 2012.

Research Cards

In order to facilitate greater understanding of research a range of research teaching and learning cards have been developed for use by academics, field educators and students, both in classroom settings and in the field. There are six different card 'suits'; research process, research methods, literature review, overcoming challenges, exploring feelings, and epistemology. Each 'suit' contains eight cards for individual characteristics of that element of research and each card contains a description of that characteristic. For example, the *Research Process* suit includes; question selection, literature review, research proposal, ethical approval, data gathering, data analysis, written record, and dissemination. Attached to each characteristic are a number of questions to facilitate critical thinking about research.

For example the characteristic "question selection" includes three questions:

- What is the central question that your research project will attempt to answer?
- Why is your research question important to answer?
- How could your research question be refined to make it more manageable to answer?

Online Video

Filmed interviews were conducted with each of the student and field educator participants and the interviews edited to create an online video teaching and learning resource. This resource is intended for use in field and classroom settings and includes comments from field educators and students on their experience of conducting research in a placement setting. Participants discuss the projects they undertook, the challenges they faced and overcame, and the knowledge development they experienced through conducting practice research.

6. Next Steps and Recommendations

Although the objectives of the project have been met and the planned tasks completed, it is evident that there is still much to do in terms of strengthening practice research capacity for social work students and within Canterbury social services. As this project has progressed we have discovered a greater lack of infrastructure, confidence and culture in relation to conducting practice research than we initially thought existed. Even so, we have also experienced a real eagerness from the social service industry, field educators and some students to rectify this significant gap in knowledge and expertise. We see considerable potential for development of this work on a range of fronts, including the following:

- Testing the research facilitation cards both in class and during field placements with a view to developing detailed instructions on their use and refining existing cards.
- Refining the research confidence scale and testing this scale further for reliability and validity with a greater number of students and field educators.
- Developing research placement assessment components and placement assessment documentation to reflect the inquiry based learning.
- Conducting a half day professional development workshop for field educators on the topic of supervising practice research placements.
- Writing a 'tip sheet' for students and educators to refer to in relation to conducting practice research.
- Consolidating the existing practice research model within the Canterbury region during 2012 and potentially developing a similar process (with another tertiary institution) in another New Zealand location(s).
- Establishing a Practice Research interest group through Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers for interested students and practitioners to join.

The collaboration between CPIT and UC social work programmes has worked extremely well, ensuring that a diversity of stakeholders have had opportunity to be part of the project and benefit from the resources developed. The research placement collaboration between these two institutions will continue.

Recommendations

- To establish a formal 'Practice Research Community of Practice' for social workers through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Work.
- To develop and conduct research that quantifies the impacts of practice research placements for student learning and agency outputs.
- To refine the pre-post placement research confidence survey instrument and test for reliability and validity over the next two years with student research cohorts studying social work at CPIT and UC.
- To continue to develop and evaluate practice research placements across CPIT and UC with the view to partnering with other institutions nationally.
- Actively raise awareness about the integral role practice research plays in social work education, practice and policy avenues through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers and the Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Appendix A

Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field Discrete Research Tasks to Complete on Placement

| Pre-Field work | Field work | Post fieldwork |
|---|---|---|
| <p><i>Prepare a funding application to support a research project for submission to a philanthropic trust or alternative funding provider</i></p> <p><i>Complete a literature review on the topic under investigation</i></p> <p><i>Draft a proposal outlining the research questions, aims, proposed participants, funding implications, ethical considerations and timelines for completion</i></p> <p><i>Draft an ethics application for submission to the agency management</i></p> <p><i>Liaise with agency staff to find out correct process for agency research ethics approval and access relevant standard application forms if available</i></p> <p><i>Write up ethics application and submit this to the agency and any outside independent committee for approval</i></p> <p><i>Once approval has been conveyed, begin the practical arrangements to carry out the fieldwork for the research</i></p> | <p><i>Following the process for conducting the research as outlined in your proposal and ethics application, make contact with your research participants and begin gathering your data</i></p> <p><i>Depending on the method of research you are using you will need to ensure you have the practical resources to gather your data. These might include:</i></p> <p><i>printed questionnaires, envelopes and postage</i></p> <p><i>recording mechanism for interviews</i></p> <p><i>Flash cards or test papers for conducting standardised tests</i></p> <p><i>appropriate supplies or equipment if you are to become a participant observer in a specific group or community (craft group or political campaign office)</i></p> <p><i>Systematically record in a research journal all of the names, contact details and times you have made to meet with research participants. Top priority needs to be given to any meeting arrangements you have made with your participants</i></p> <p><i>If you need to access secondary data located in secure environments timetable in visits to access hardcopy material in collections such as archives, hardcopy text, film or digital information. Begin by first sourcing what you can via the internet</i></p> | <p><i>Complete data entry of quantitative results</i></p> <p><i>Code interview and focus group transcriptions using the method outlined in the research proposal and ethics application. Having more than one person coding interview data independently strengthens the 'trustworthiness' of qualitative data analysis</i></p> <p><i>Draw up a set of preliminary findings and meet with the reference group to discuss these. Make links back to the material covered in the literature review</i></p> <p><i>Write up research report for the agency</i></p> <p><i>Disseminate research findings and recommendations to the participants in ways that were agreed during the first phase of the project. (presentation, summary report)</i></p> <p><i>If appropriate organize a 'launch' for the research to re-engage with interested stakeholders and fulfill reporting and accountability duties while also raising awareness of the findings</i></p> <p><i>Begin the planning process for how the research recommendations may be actioned to shape future practice or policy development</i></p> |

(Beddoe & Maidment, 2009: 59) This table was reproduced with the kind permission of Cengage Publishing, Melbourne.

Appendix B

Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field Pre-placement Research Confidence Questionnaire

Please complete each section of the questionnaire as fully as possible. Indicate your selections by marking a cross in the relevant circle - ⊗ or colouring it in - ●

Personal Details

Please provide us with some basic demographic information

1. Your age: Years
2. Your gender:
 Male Female
3. Your ethnicity:
4. Your mother's maiden name:
5. Are you a student or a Field Educator?
Student
Field Educator
6. If you're a student is this your first or second placement?
First Placement
Second Placement

General Confidence

7. I am able to undertake the role of a 'Social Work Researcher'.

- Strongly Disagree Unsure Strongly Agree

8. My network of professional support in relation to research includes:
(Select as many as apply)

- Past or present tutors
Academic librarian
Manager
Professional supervisor
Agency colleagues
Other

Please specify:

Appendix C

Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field Post-Placement Research Confidence Questionnaire

Please complete each section of the questionnaire as fully as possible. Indicate your selections by marking a cross in the relevant circle - ⊗ or colouring it in - ●

Personal Details

Please provide us with some basic demographic information

1. Your age: Years

2. Your gender:

Male

Female

3. Your ethnicity:

5. Are you a student or a Field Educator?

Student

Field Educator

6. If you're a student is this your first or second placement?

First Placement

Second Placement

4. Your mother's maiden name:

General Confidence

7. I am able to undertake the role of a 'Social Work Researcher'.

Strongly
Disagree

Unsure

Strongly
Agree

8. My network of professional support in relation to research includes:
(Select as many as apply)

Past or present tutors

Academic librarian

Manager

Professional supervisor

Agency colleagues

Other

Please specify:

Appendix C
Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field
Post-Placement Research Confidence Questionnaire

Research Process Continued

22. I can research and write a literature review.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

23. I know how to analyse quantitative data.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

24. I know how to code qualitative data.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

25. I have a good understanding of the structure of research reports.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

26. I know how to present the findings of a research project in writing.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

27. I know how to present the findings of a research project orally.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | | Unsure | | Strongly Agree |

28. How do you think this placement will help/has helped your learning about research?

Appendix D
Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field
Student Journal Template

Name:

Date:

Placement

Week:

The purpose of this template is to record on a regular basis (at least once weekly) your experiences, reflections, learning and questions regarding practice research. Please use 1 sheet per week to record these items for discussion in supervision, and get written feedback from your supervisor.

Detail the key research activities you have done during the last week. Remember to include the action points carried over from last week.

What are the challenges you are currently facing with the research tasks?

What has gone particularly well in relation to the research tasks?

Appendix D
Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field
Student Journal Template

What specifically are the key things about research you have learned this week?

Questions to discuss in supervision

Outcomes/Actions for the next week

Field Educator comment

**Field Educator
Signature:**

Date:

Student Signature:

Date:

Appendix E

Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field Interview Schedule for Student Audio Interviews

1. When you first learned you were being allocated to a practice research placement, how did you feel?
2. When you began your placement, what were your thoughts about the role of research in social work?
 - a. Have these views changed at all since doing your placement?
3. What was the topic of your research?
4. What were the research tasks you undertook on placement?
5. What did you learn about conducting research on your placement?
6. Tell me about how you see the role of research in social work practice?
7. What were the highlights of your practice research placement?
8. What were the challenges in completing your practice research?
9. What helped you complete the research tasks?
10. In what ways, if at all, did the research tutorials held during the placement help in your research work?
 - a. Would you recommend any changes to the tutorial format?
11. How did your supervision contribute, or not, to your conducting the research?
12. Do you have any plans for conducting practice research in the future?

Thank you for completing this interview with me today

Appendix F
Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field
Interview Schedule for Field Educator Audio Interviews

1. Please can you tell me your role, agency and describe the functions of the agency?
2. How did you become interested in participating in the practice research placement project?
3. How did you decide what the research topic or questions would be for the student research?
4. What were the research tasks you wanted the student to complete?
5. What have been the challenges encountered in supervising a student research project?
6. What are the benefits for the agency for having a student doing a research placement?
7. How have other staff in the agency responded to having a research placement?
8. What would your advice be to other managers considering having a student on research placement?
9. How has the research placement opened up possibilities for other ways (CPIT / UC) might work with agencies?
10. How do you see research fitting in with the day to day work of the agency?
11. How do you see the project progressing from here?
12. Any other comments?

Thank you for completing this interview with me today

Appendix G
Learning to conduct collaborative social work research in the field
List of Initial Analysis Categories

1. Advice
2. Assessment
3. Challenges
4. Confidence
5. Developmental model
6. Enjoyment
7. Evidence Based Practice
8. Future of Research
9. Identity
10. Impacts
11. Isolation
12. Learning
13. Legitimacy
14. Perceptions
15. Practical requirements
16. Relationship between practice and research
17. Strategies
18. Supervision
19. Team
20. Unrealistic expectations