Social Work Field Practicum Instruction During COVID-19:
Facilitation of the Remote Learning Plan

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Abstract

In social work, integration of theory and practice primarily occurs within the practicum. For practitioners, enacting the role of field instructor is associated with both personal and professional benefits. The COVID-19 pandemic led to dramatic challenges in this role, given that many student placements transitioned from in-person to remote engagement. This study explores the experience of field instructors in supervising social work students who were engaged in remote learning plans. Their experiences followed a continuum from crisis to developing a "new normal," with opportunities that augmented and, occasionally, had benefits over traditional approaches to field education.

Keywords: Canada; COVID-19; field education; remote learning; virtual learning

Introduction

Field education has become the signature pedagogy for the social work profession in that it serves to teach the skills and competencies associated with this professional

designation (Bogo, 2006). It is in the "real-world" context provided by the practicum experience that both undergraduate and graduate social work students are able to integrate the theory learned in the classroom to social work practice under the supervision of established social workers. Similar to its role in other professional programs, the field practicum in social work education is the primary location where students learn to integrate and apply the values, knowledge, complex practices, and skills of the profession (Bogo, 2015; Egan et al., 2018).

While the academic setting is one forum for the integration of theory and practice, the opportunity to demonstrate acquisition and application of this knowledge in a realistic context falls largely to the student's supervised field placement. It is within the structured field placement that the means and process knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Miller, 2010; Oliver, 2013). The benefits of field education have been well documented; in addition to the overarching goal of integrating theory and practice, students learn to develop direct practice skills, to evaluate their interventions, and to engage in a process of learning how to emotionally manage the challenges embedded in the clinical realm (Bogo, 2015). Many of the competencies associated with professional social work practice are difficult to discern and evaluate solely within the classroom setting. Field education is an integral component of any social work curriculum, particularly in helping students develop essential professional competencies around the demonstration of the empathy, maturity, and overall emotional intelligence needed for professional practice. The field placement also serves as an evaluative mechanism for determining competency and subsequent student readiness for professional practice.

A vital component of social work field education is the role of the field instructor. Field instructors are typically experienced practicing social workers in the community who selflessly commit to voluntarily supervising social work students in their placements, typically in addition to their existing responsibilities. Field instructors are responsible for administrative and managerial tasks, facilitating professional development activities, and supportive tasks, as well as providing the student with an avenue for reflection and at times emotional support (Alschuler et al., 2015). These responsibilities are coupled with the additional roles of mentoring and teaching students the necessary knowledge, skills, and values required for professional practice (Bogo et al., 2017).

The quality of the relationships developed between social work students and their respective field instructors is of paramount importance in the process of learning in the field, and is often the barometer for the success or failure and quality of the students experience of practicum. Pehrson et al. (2009) noted that the supervisory relationship has the potential to shape how both students and supervisors approach the overall practicum experience with respect to the quality of learning and skill development. Ultimately, the quality of this relationship has the potential to impact clients/service

users. The benefits of taking on the role of field supervisor for practicing social workers have been well documented, and include providing an avenue for meeting their own needs for professional practice, gaining leadership experience, facilitating their own learning, providing an intrinsic sense of giving back to the profession, and having the opportunity to mentor future social workers (Gushwa & Harriman, 2019; Ketner et al., 2017; Street, 2019). Ketner and colleagues (2017) examined the benefits of field supervision and found "the meaning and value of supervision held intrinsic value for both field instructors and students" (p. 14). For many practicing social workers, the decision to take on the role of field instructor is guided by a desire to contribute to the professional growth of students, and fundamentally to the discipline of social work as a whole. The intrinsic value, according to the authors was "the value of providing something beyond themselves" (Ketner et al., 2017, p. 14).

Social work field education and the role of field instructor became more complicated in March 2020 with the emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The uncontrolled spread of the virus across the world, including Canada, prompted the widespread implementation of strict quarantine measures in an effort to stop the spread of the virus via human-to-human contact ("Covid 19 Surges," 2020; Government of Canada, 2020). For agencies and organizations nationally, including those in the social service sector, these measures included the transition to remote work, physical (social) distancing, cancelling of events that involved large groups of the population, and, importantly, the closing of elementary/secondary schools (Province of Ontario, 2020). For universities and colleges, it meant the cancellation of classes and the immediate move to virtual or online learning to finish semesters that were within weeks of completion. Across many universities, classes were moved to online or blended formats for the remainder of the winter term, with announcements that spring and summer classes would also be taught completely remotely.

The authors' teaching institution is a liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students located in London, Ontario. The college has been involved in the delivery of social work education since 1969. There are currently approximately 100 students in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program, 40 in the two-year Master of Social Work (MSW) stream for non-BSW students, and 20 in the advanced standing one-year MSW program for individuals with a BSW degree.

For the School of Social Work, the restrictions and limitations imposed by the pandemic had far-reaching implications that went beyond a disruption in classroom instruction. Cancelling or suspending field practicums would have impacted not only the graduate students who had completed only half of the placement hours required for graduation, but also a block of undergraduate students scheduled to begin a six-week, time-intensive placement. The result was the implementation of a creative solution that involved the students developing a Remote Learning Plan (RLP).

The RLP formed the foundation of the learning contract students developed upon entering the field practicum portion of their degree requirements. It existed to articulate the scope of their learning, and ultimately served as a key component for their evaluation upon completion of the placement. The RLP assisted students in quantifying their learning goals within the broad categories of knowledge acquisition, practice skills, values and ethical practice, professional conduct, personal development, and the administrative context of practice. Under each of these categories, students identified what remote activities (goals) they would engage in during the course of their practicum, while identifying measurable objectives and means to achieve each goal virtually. During the pandemic, the RLP worked in conjunction with the traditional student learning contract to identify relevant, meaningful, and measurable goals within the limitations imposed by physical distancing. The goal was for students to develop the RLP in collaboration with their field instructors (FI) and assigned faculty consultants (Mantulak et al., in press).

The transition of students from traditional face-to-face practicums to remote learning also had direct implications for the field instructors responsible for the progression in practicum, who had never supervised students remotely. This current study was developed to qualitatively explore the experience of social work field instructors who had the opportunity to supervise students who had transitioned to remote learning plans during the global health pandemic. This study is important for the potential insights it can provide with respect to how supervising social work students is both different and similar in a remote learning model, and to explore some of the associated challenges and opportunities presented to field social workers involved in student-led learning. In the process, this study highlights the implications for field instructors, and, more generally, schools of social work, in a pandemic and postpandemic period.

Methodology

This study utilized a semistructured, qualitative instrument to solicit from field instructors their perceptions and experiences when supervising social work students who had transitioned their field practicum learning to a remote learning plan. With the assistance of Qualtrics, a web-based software program, the research team developed a list of questions to guide field instructors in a reflection on their remote learning experiences (see Appendix). The survey went live in June 2020 and remained open until July 2020. The link to the survey was sent to 112 field instructors and received 50 responses, providing a 44.6% response rate. The project was approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee of the college.

Study Sample

The study sample consisted of 50 social work field instructors who supervised two groups of students. The two groups comprised 61 MSW students who, at the time the restrictions and limitations of the pandemic were imposed, had been engaged in face-to-face placement experiences, and had then to transition to remote learning plans to complete their required practicum hours. The second group involved 11 BSW students who were scheduled to begin a six-week, time-intensive block placement that was initially scheduled to be in person but, due to the pandemic, was moved to solely remote learning. Those who participated in the study had an average of 10 years of supervising experience, with an average of seven students, over that time period. Field instructor participants for this study represented a range of social work areas of practice, including criminal justice, child welfare, physical health, mental health, and individual/family counselling.

Data Analysis

Qualtrics was used to develop and organize the survey results. The responses were generated in transcript form, allowing for analysis by the research team. Thematic analysis was used to examine the participants' survey responses to identify common themes based on the questions in the survey. Data analysis consisted of a three-stage coding process undertaken by four researchers with experience in qualitative data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Each researcher independently engaged in line-by-line coding of each transcript, in order to generate emergent categories of the key concepts and ideas shared by the research participants.

The second stage of the analysis was the identification of the most significant and frequent codes within a process of constant comparative approach (Charmaz, 2014). The results of the data were revealed through multiple iterations of sifting, sorting, modifying, and comparing codes independently. The research team discussed the draft codes collaboratively to ensure consistency and to refine the codes. The researchers came together after thorough coding and the subsequent identification of common themes had been established, to compare and discuss prevalent themes and to ensure consistency and understanding. The information presented in this article represents the common themes established through analysis of the interviews. The quotations provided are verbatim examples taken from the interview transcripts.

Findings

Unsurprisingly, the study's findings highlight that the provision of social work field instruction during the pandemic was a unique experience. However, providing supervision in a remote manner did not fundamentally alter the reasons social workers took on this additional voluntary activity. The narratives of the participants reflected that the transition from traditional face-to-face placement instruction to a remote

model initially reflected many of the aspects of a crisis situation. However, once the feelings of crisis associated with this new form of learning dissipated, field instructors, along with their students, occupied a space described by the authors of this research as a "new normal." Amid this altered approach to field instruction, participants, upon reflection, noted that embedded within the "new normal" were opportunities for a greater development of student skills and capacities not afforded in traditional models of field instruction, often challenging students to do more than they might have attempted had they been in a traditional student–supervisor relationship.

What did not change in supervising social work students remotely, according to the field instructors in this study, were the personal and professional benefits garnered from the experience of being a field instructor. Comments included:
- "They (students) provide me with a great opportunity to mentor up and coming social workers."
- "Nice to mentor the next generation of social workers."

Assuming responsibility for a student is a challenge for social workers, even those with many years of experience. The fact that supervision occurred in a remote format did not change the fact that this opportunity continued to allow field instructors to reflect on their own practice, even if they have never practiced in this manner:
- "I take students every year because they force me to reflect on my own practice and why I approach situations the way I do—they challenge my thinking."
- "Students make me reflect on my own work and [I] have to be able to articulate theoretically the underpinnings for doing things in a certain way."

Even in the uncertainty produced by the pandemic, students were still perceived to impart a renewed energy to agencies and to practice itself:
- "Students bring energy and enthusiasm to our work with service users and to the agency as a whole."
- "Students bring a fresh perspective to the workplace."

Students can also, at times, positively disrupt a culture of status quo: "They sometimes come with a different perspective that we hadn't thought of before because they are still learning, a different viewpoint regarding service delivery and our policies and procedures." Students not only provided a value-added quality to agencies—e.g., "My agency benefits because students have more capacity to work on projects that we have had on the back burner."—but several field instructors stated that students made valuable contributions to new and existing projects.

Relatedly, the value of students often transcends beyond the agency, to the level of the service user:
- "Students are invaluable in our agencies' ability to meet the needs of an ever-

increasing caseload of service users by helping with caseloads and group facilitation.

- "[E]xtra support for clinical staff in the group therapy our agency offers, like having a second therapist."

However, the transition of students to remote learning from traditionally situated placements as a response to the pandemic also served to create extensive challenges to the field instructors' role and responsibilities. For the majority of participating field instructors, this transition was characterized as a credible crisis situation, a novel circumstance for which they were required to manage emotionally and cope with practically. Similar to what society as a whole was experiencing relative to the pandemic, practicing social workers experienced sudden and abrupt changes to their role and responsibilities as field instructors, for which there were no prescriptive guidelines to follow. As several participants noted,

- "Definitely a time where I wasn't sure what was going on, I was feeling isolated in my role, the student was feeling isolated from the placement."
- "The student was totally disconnected from me and the agency, we didn't know what (the student) was doing."

Overall, the field instructors found the transition to remote learning challenging to manage in the face of having to reenvision the student–field instructor relationship. One respondent noted,

- "I found the remote learning a real challenge. There was no opportunity for a quick 'in the moment' consultation or discussion, which was very disappointing."
- "I felt completely out of the loop with respect to the students learning, practice and time, and I felt bad as I was supposed to be the one responsible for their learning, so difficult to do this remotely."

A reenvisioned relationship with the students was only one aspect of field instruction that was altered significantly. Fulfilling the responsibilities associated with remote supervision required more, not less, time, most notably in the area of supporting the student emotionally:

- "My student was very lonely and feeling disconnected, I found myself spending an inordinate amount of time providing emotional support to them."
- "A lot of time was needed to discuss things that were unrelated to placement, which I saw as a poor use of time."
- "Seemed like I was spending more time talking about the student's issues than what the clients were dealing with."

Secondly, the field instructors discovered that it was a challenge to provide an accurate assessment and/or evaluation of their students' progress in placement:

- "It was difficult to arrange any observation of direct practice work. I did not have the benefit of first-hand observing the student interacting with others and, most importantly, clients."
- "It was difficult to see how she was developing her therapeutic skills and also difficult for me to assess how she was coping with her own self-care."

Thirdly, the feedback from participating field instructors indicated an inherent struggle to provide a field education experience to the students that was nontraditional in every way:

- "I felt less of an ability to develop relationships, evaluate the student, and generally be a good supervisor doing all remote, just not like it was before."
- "All my interactions with the student were by phone or Zoom. which is not ideal and it was difficult to observe, provide feedback and assess this way, was noticeably easier and better when we were face to face."

Lastly, many field instructors felt at times a sense of isolation from their students amid the experience. As one respondent noted,

- "It was a challenge to establish a supervisory relationship via Zoom only, felt like I really didn't know the student on a personal level."; and
- "[D]ifficult and tedious to maintain effective communication and connection during the practicum with the student."

In addition, some participating social workers noted also that they felt a sense of isolation from the hosting school of social work: "[G]iven all the communication and changes happening so quickly it was challenging to stay on top of the requirements from the School of Social Work—felt a bit out of the loop." The isolation, at times, was real for field instructors, as they seemingly waded into uncharted territory with their students.

Some agencies that traditionally took student placements indicated they could not, as they had not yet determined how they would transition in response to public health orders arising from the pandemic, and thus did not know how students would fit into their new practice model, despite the flexibility provided by the RLP. For others, taking students in this time of uncertainty was viewed as "an additional workload to manage in already limited time to see my clients."

Although for some field instructors the transition to remote learning could be described as creating a crisis, field instructors who participated in this study were also able to identify that they could, rather expediently, move to a phase of adjustment to this "new normal." A period of stabilization occurred, during which both field instructors and students found a "rhythm" in the practicum routine:

- "Intuitively we worked through all the barriers very quickly and were able to

develop policies and procedures to make it a successful term for both the student and the agency."
- "I was skeptical at first about my student doing a practicum remotely, but once we got going and worked through the technology everything was fine and it was a good experience."
- "I was hesitant at first and wondered how I would supervise a student in this format but after some hiccups it seemed to work for her (the student) and the agency."

Interestingly, however, in some instances field instructors reflecting upon their experiences noted that not only had they, along with the students, found a "rhythm" in placement in the context of remote engagement, but also there were areas of practicum experience that were indeed enhanced. For example, several field instructors identified supervision time with students as being more formally structured, and thus perceived as leading to a more efficient use of time than had sometimes been experienced in the traditional model of field instruction:
- "Because supervision meetings were held by Zoom, students were punctual, and the supervision time tended to be very focused. In other words, there was little opportunity for informal, ad hoc supervision throughout the week, so this way made it more efficient in terms of time management."
- Supervision became less time consuming because it was limited to once a week, from 60 to 120 minutes rather than throughout each day, which had been the case."

In addition, more opportunities for student development resulted from the transition to remote learning, as supervisors identified the ability to give students other activities of learning not available in the traditional practicum model:
- "My students were able to complete some projects that [they] would have not been able to complete in the traditional field setting, such as creating group programming, completing supplementary coursework, reading, and attending seminars."
- "The students were able to participate in policy development and development (facilitation) of new support groups that I am not sure they would have had the chance to do before this."

As previously indicated, field instructors noted growth from this experience that went beyond the students' development:
- "[Remote learning] provided a learning that was placed heavily on the student, which I think had some benefits to it. It made the students have to think outside the box and discover methods of putting theory to practice."
- "It forced us to get creative about how we could meet the students' learning goals. We needed to innovate and accomplish most of the students' learning

goals in nontraditional ways."

For many field instructors who were able to positively reflect on the transition to remote learning as an opportunity, it carried with it a renewed sense of satisfaction:

- "I can say my student thrived in the remote practicum more than they would have in the traditional in-person, face-to-face in terms of opportunities to be creative."
- "Despite the bumpy start I think the practicum went better than expected and the student was able to develop skills and abilities I am not sure they would have in the past."

Interestingly, one of the practical reasons that prevented agencies in the past from taking students, or taking as many students as they wanted to—a lack of space—became a moot point under the remote learning plan.

Discussion

The findings from this study serve to highlight a number of important aspects of field instruction as it exists as a structure for teaching social work students in the field. That said, what is unique about the collection of themes derived from this project is that the experiences of this particular sample of field instructors occurred within the context of an unprecedented global pandemic. The findings unearthed that field instruction during the transition to remote models of supervisory instruction could be experienced as a distinct process of changing from a perceived crisis period to the establishment of a "new normal" that included the potential for growth and development.

The abrupt transition from traditional field instruction to remote learning necessitated by the pandemic, created, for field instructors, a period of disequilibrium for themselves, their students, and in most cases the host agencies themselves. With all the hallmarks of a crisis, field instructors expressed challenges including a perceived inability to maintain adequate contact and communication with their students, a sense of inadequacy in being able to adequately assess and evaluate their students' skill base and knowledge, and difficulties in the provision of opportunities for students to engage with clients in real time. The initial period of transition was experienced as a crisis, concomitant with the loss of traditionally held practices and beliefs about what good field education comprises.

The pandemic, and the need for students to be engaged remotely, made it impossible for field instructors to maintain traditional ways and means of carrying out the roles and responsibilities associated with the position, such as face-to-face contact, the ability to physically connect and develop relationships with students, and the ability to physically "eye" the student with respect to their progress and skills.

Such activities traditionally embedded in the role were perceived as all but lost by participants. As students stumbled amid this new reality, so too did field educators, which left them feeling unsure, isolated, and anxious. Yet, amongst this turmoil, the reasons individuals take on this volunteer responsibility still prevailed; the underlying principles of bringing students into the field and mentoring them did not change during this far-reaching crisis period.

It is noteworthy that concerns raised by the participants in this study relative to their roles and responsibilities as field instructors existed against the backdrop of renewed demands on their work with service users, demands for shifts in service delivery, increased involvement in the development of interagency policies, and the institution of procedures to guide new remote service delivery. Although not mentioned specifically, a factor not to be overlooked is the likelihood that in addition to enacting the role of field instructor, many if not all of the participants were simultaneously attempting to juggle the inherent challenges of COVID-19 in their personal lives, in the form of responsibilities of caregiving and ensuring the health and safety of themselves and their loved ones. This personal element provides an additional context for their responses to the survey, and may have contributed to their sense of being overwhelmed at the onset of the transition to remote learning. As professional social workers, field instructors, and everyday citizens, study participants were attempting to manage change resulting from the pandemic not only in the field instruction role, but also at every level of their lives. The result was a crisis of confidence, competence, and perspective, and yet they nevertheless did take on the role and were instrumental in creating positive learning experiences for the majority of practicum students (Mantulak et al., in review).

As noted, the experience of the participating field instructors can be understood as proceeding from crisis to "new normal." Interestingly, they were able to reflect on aspects of field instruction that were not just a return to normal but were also enhanced by a remote model. For example, many field supervisors felt that their time with students was more efficient and effective, that students were more engaged in the process of supervision, and that despite the inability to be in a real-time environment, they were still able to find ways to assess and evaluate their students' learning effectively. In addition, students were given opportunities to engage in activities such as the development of groups, policy and procedure development, and engagement in ancillary projects, which perhaps may not have occurred in traditionally situated placements.

Although the experience of transitioning to remote learning would not meet the threshold of trauma, the process of moving from crisis to growth and development theoretically mirrors Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) understanding of posttraumatic growth, wherein "a positive psychological change is experienced as a result of the

struggle with highly challenging life circumstances" (p. 1). Within their theoretical framework, Tedeschi and Calhoun posited that the potential exists for individuals to derive positive growth from experiences that are traditionally understood as solely stressful or traumatizing. Important in their conceptualization of growth is that it is not a return to baseline or normal, but rather it is an experience of improvement or growth for the individuals involved (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Tedeschi & Calhoun's (2004) framework is useful in understanding the experiences of field instructors amid the pandemic, and may in some ways help redefine the experience from something that, in popular discourse, is perceived as inherently negative, to something that can be viewed as the unknowing creation of a space for opportunities not considered, or deemed improbable, in traditional in-person field placements. It should be noted that not all field instructors interviewed for this study identified areas of growth for themselves or their students, and several long-standing field instructors were not able or allowed to take students at the onset of the pandemic. However, this too is consistent with notions of posttraumatic growth, in which a personal sense of reflection and insight, coupled with support, are often catalysts for reflection on opportunities for development.

In this context, the narratives of some field supervisors indicated they did not feel supported by their agencies or the School of Social Work. Coupled with their personal challenges amid the pandemic, this potentially contributed to their inability to identify any positive features of the experience of remote supervision. That said, the findings from this study highlight a distinct process of experience for field instructors amid the challenges of the pandemic and the transition to remote supervision. The insights gleaned from this study will serve to provide an understanding of this experience for field instructors moving forward, and ideally help create strategies to assist the School of Social Work to better assist field instructors in their role amid a virtual environment, which will most likely be retained in some manner even after the pandemic is brought under control.

Limitations

This study was completed at one small liberal arts college in Canada. The size of the school and its active student-centred field education team—three full-time employees, two professional officers, and one staff member, for 150 students—distinguish it from other schools that do not offer the same degree of support to students. In this way, the School has strong and ongoing relationships with field instructors, a fact that may have been reflected in the response rate. The principal investigator did not have any direct contact with any of the field instructors in the study with regard to their student experiences in remote learning environments. Also, the pandemic response in Canada was distinct from that in other jurisdictions, particularly the United States, where there

are differing applications of public health knowledge. Finally, the supporting quotes were intended to serve as exemplars that reflected the experience of field instructors who completed the survey; there was variance in responses in examples that were not included.

Implications for Practice, Teaching and Research

The findings from this study serve to identify several important implications for the practice of field instruction, as well as for social work field practicums in general, both during the current pandemic and in a postpandemic environment. In addition, embedded in the narratives of the field instructors who participated in this study are notable points of introspection useful for schools of social work towards positioning themselves to provide additional support and guidance to practicing social workers when providing field education in a remote context.

For field instructors, this study reiterated the continued importance and benefit of enacting this role on behalf of the profession. Despite the changes in and challenges to the role precipitated by COVID-19, the rewards and benefits professionally and personally for practicing social workers were primarily still accessible. This is an important implication for the field, for, as noted in the body of this paper, field education is a signature pedagogy of the profession, and the involvement of field social workers in this educational process should continue to be nurtured and promoted by the profession.

This study also highlighted the need for field instructors to pay attention to the emotional needs of social work students, who, most notably during the pandemic, are managing many roles, responsibilities, and anxieties associated with being a student in a professional program. The pandemic has heightened levels of anxiety, concern, and uncertainty for all members of society. For social work students, these feelings may present themselves in practicum settings, where they often are already experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed, uncertain, and vulnerable. Field instructors need to be mindful of this potential, and to incorporate into supervision discussion and/ or processing of these emotions as "teachable moments." How students process and manage themselves emotionally can be a barometer of their ability to succeed in placement and to learn "use of self" skills in professional practice.

For field instructors, and to a lesser extent the agencies with which they are affiliated, the findings from this study highlight that although the pandemic and its associated restrictions has altered traditional views of social work field education, it has also brought new opportunities. One possible opportunity is for students to become more engaged, when faced with having to use their time more effectively and efficiently. In addition, students were able to involve themselves in agency projects, research

opportunities, and policy and procedure review and development—activities they were able to do remotely and that perhaps would not have been available in traditional models of field instruction. In addition, several students were given the opportunity to engage service users and, in the process, develop skills of engagement in a remote or virtual environment, at the same time as their field instructors were developing these skills. Finally, the traditional argument "we have no space for students" will need to be rethought by reluctant agency leaders as a rationale for not providing learning opportunities for the next generation of practitioners.

For schools of social work, an important implication derived from this study is the vital importance of maintaining communication and support with field instructors during practicum periods. It was noted in the narratives of several study participants that they felt isolated in this secondary role due to a lack of information provided by the institution. This isolation has the potential to lead to frustration, and could result in field social workers withdrawing from providing field education opportunities in the future. The study's findings highlight the important role schools play in supporting not only students in the field but also field instructors. Support and communication to both parties are essential in the field education process, most notably during times of uncertainty and upheaval, as was witnessed during the pandemic.

This research project examined a framework for delivering remote student placements (Mantulak, in press), student responses to this approach (Mantiulak, in review), and now the experiences of field instructors. The next step will be to interview the actual service users, to obtain their thoughts and insights on what it was like to receive service through a remote learning plan, and on how social work students were able to meet their needs during this society-altering event.

Conclusion

The pandemic and its associated restrictions posed several challenges to traditional ways of providing social work field education. For field instructors, in their role as stewards of this process, the pandemic meant having to let go of long-held ways of communicating with students, undertaking supervision, and evaluating student development. In its wake, however, field instructors identified opportunities to engage students differently, exposing them to new remote and virtual opportunities, and in the process developed new and innovative ways to assess and evaluate students' progression in practicum. As much as the field instructors were challenged at the beginning of the pandemic by the loss of some traditional ways of doing field education, they were able to settle into a new normal that resulted in new opportunities to be creative with an old pedagogy, while maintaining the underlying reasons for taking on the role of student supervisors and mentors. This study highlighted that, going forward, there are lessons to be learned for field instructors

themselves, for the profession, and for stakeholder agencies, that will serve to alter and improve field education, now and postpandemic.

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Appendix

1. Have you supervised social work students prior to this academic year (January 2020–June 2020)?

( ) If yes, for how many years? Please go to question 2
( ) If no, please go to question 3.

2a. Please indicate the positives of having previously served as Field Instructor and having supervised social work students to
     (i) you
     (ii) your agency
     (iii) your service users

2b. Please indicate the negatives of having previously served as Field Instructor and having supervised social work students to
     (i) you
     (ii) your agency
     (iii) your service users

3. If in the past year (January–June 2020) you had social work students complete their practicum through ONLY a REMOTE LEARNING format please answer questions 3–5.

If in the past year you ONLY had social work students ONLY TRANSITION from a traditional field learning experience to a remote learning format, please go to question 6.

If in the past year you had students complete their practicum BOTH through only a remote learning format and transition from a traditional field learning experience to a remote learning format we would appreciate if you could answer all remaining questions. Thank you.

3a. How would you describe the social work student remote learning practicum you supervised?

*3b. What were the **advantages** you experienced in having social work students complete their placement only through remote learning?*

*3c. What were the **challenges** that you experienced in having social work students complete their placement only through remote learning?*

*3d. What were the **advantages** that you experienced in providing student supervision remotely?*

*3e. What were the **challenges** that you experienced in providing student supervision remotely?*

3f. Can you identify any specific barriers that inhibited your ability to provide remote student field supervision?

4. What were the benefits to
>   (i) you
>   (ii) your agency
>   (iii) your service users
>   of completing the field placement under a remote learning format?

5. What were the challenges to:
>   (i) you
>   (ii) your agency
>   (iii) your service users
of completing the field placement under a remote learning format?

If you did NOT have any social work students transition from a traditional field placement experience to a remote learning experience, please go to Question 9.

6a. How would you describe your experience in providing social work student supervision during the transition from in-person to remote learning environment?

*6b. What were the **advantages** you experienced in having social work students transition to the remote learning plan during their practicum?*

*6c. What were the **challenges** that you experienced in having social work students transition to the remote learning plan during their practicum?*

6d. What were the advantages that you experienced in providing student supervision remotely as compared to in-person (traditional field supervision)?

6e. What were the challenges that you experienced in providing student supervision remotely as compared to in-person (traditional field supervision)?

6f. Can you identify any specific barriers that inhibited your ability to provide remote student field supervision?

7. What were the benefits to
>   (i) you
>   (ii) your agency

     (iii) your service users
to continuing the field placement under a remote learning format?

8. What were the challenges to:
     (i) you
     (ii) your agency
     (iii) your service users
to continuing the field placement under a remote learning plan (RLP)?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your remote student field supervision experience?

Thank you very much for your time in completing these questions