



Social work placement: New approaches. New thinking. Home visiting - urban and rural, the virtual world of training. cultural competence. Book 3

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3

Social Work Placement

**New Approaches.
New Thinking.**

Home Visiting – Urban & Rural
The Virtual World of Training
Cultural Competence

Marguerita McGovern

MULTI-TOUCH
BOOK

Social Work Placement

New Approaches.
New Thinking.

Home Visiting - Urban & Rural
The Virtual World of Training
Cultural Competence
Book 3

Marguerita McGovern

Social Work Placement.

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Introduction



Follow the link to view Introduction to Book 3 <https://youtu.be/BeHMnN3VQ4c>

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Glossary

Practice Placement can also mean **Practicum** or **Field Education** or **Fieldwork Placement**. Fieldwork Placement is the current term used in Ireland and U.K.

Practice Learning takes place within the practice placement, practicum or **Field education** experience.

Placement Practice Teaching refers to the teaching given by the **Practice Teacher** to the student while on placement.

Fieldwork Co-ordinator and **Practice Learning Coordinator** are interchangeable. In Ireland these are University based staff positions.

Practice Teacher or **Fieldwork Supervisor** is the **field educator**, **fieldwork assessor**. In the majority of fieldwork placements this is the qualified registered social worker giving the social work student experience and supervision on placement. Practice Teachers may or may not hold Postgraduate qualifications in Practice Teaching or Supervision. It is desirable that Practice Teachers may have attended some in-service training courses in social work practice teaching and/or supervision but this is not always a requirement for taking a student on placement.

Tutor is interchangeable with the title Liaison person for some worldwide social work course placements. The Tutor may be an internal staff and/or outside senior practitioner acting as mentor to the social work student.

Tri-partite Meeting: This is the name given to the meeting which takes place within the Agency during the placement period. In Ireland and in the majority of Masters in Social Work courses in U.K. there are two Agency visits per placement (one within the first 10 days of placement and one at approximately week 8 of a 14 week placement). This is followed by a telephone conversation between all parties towards the end of the placement (approximately week 12 or a 14 week placement). Meetings are attended by the Practice Teacher, Student and Tutor and usually last one hour. At NUI Galway, Ireland, using the template in the Fieldwork Manual the written report of these meetings is taken by the student and verified by all parties. The student, practice teacher, tutor and the Fieldwork Co-ordinator all receive copies of these meetings with a copy held in the MSW student's file.

Where possible the term **individual, family, community** is used to illustrate the type of groupings that social work students become

involved with during their placement. These groupings are also referred to as **clients, client groups** or **service users**.

The term **University** is interchangeable with **College, Technical Institute** or other third level institution

The **MA Social Work** is also referred to as the **MSW**. In many instances examples and opinions discussed can also be transposed onto a **BSW** course.

Home Visiting - Power - The Virtual World - Cultural Competence

Home visit is a strategy for service delivery (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004; Ginsberg, 2007; Wayne *et al.* 2010) based on the precepts of ecological theory (Nievar *et al.* 2010) and recognising the historical uniqueness and strength of Mary Richmond and her 'friendly volunteer visiting' (Richmond, 1899; 1969). A tacit agreement usually exists between social worker and service user in regards to the home visit but in some cases there may be little welcome for the social worker or their service. Child protection and welfare issues connected with home visiting tend to dominate in the texts and research papers (Le Croy & Whitaker, 2005; Sweet & Applebaum, 2004; Wasik & Bryant, 2001; Wasik & Roberts, 1994) but there is also some evidence of research on home visiting with other client groups such as; mental health (Byrne, 2014), parental and early childhood support (Cooley, 2011; Allan, 2007; Dunst, 2000; Turnbull *et al.* 2012), disability (Farran, 2000) and individuals who have been affected by the court system (Henggeler *et al.* 1998). For the student, home visiting is about sharpening their observational skills, assessing strengths and limitations, dealing with possible challenging behaviour and from the beginning saying "What do I know from the referral and where do I go to from here?"

This vehicle for intervention represents a holistic assessment of the service user and their environment (Ferguson, 2010a; 2010b; 2009). Harry Ferguson's research helps us to observe and connect to new ways in how 'the movement of people, bodies, cars, information and activities such as walking and driving are central to social work and everyday life' (Ferguson, 2008 p. 146). He further suggests regarding child protection home visiting that, 'The aim is to increase understanding of the experience of having to move into and through other people's homes to try and access children and work with their parents and carers, which constitutes the core experience of social work and child protection' (p. 147).

Over the course of many years, social workers in education, mental health, hospice care, gerontology, disability organisations and most particularly child and family services, have regarded home visiting as an intrinsic way in which to build relationships and where necessary use home visiting as an investigative tool in risk assessment (Hancock & Pelton, 1989; Allen & Tracy, 2013).

The axis on which social work home visiting turns, is the ability of the visitor (social worker or social work student) to make and establish

relationships. There are varying degrees by which this can be successfully achieved due to the nature of the visit (whether it is to process information, perform assessment or determine risk). These aspects may change over the life span of the casework or the capacity of both professional visitor and/or client. Building relationships with service users is essential in all professional capacities but home visiting is a **highly skilled, emotive and powerfully distinctive interaction**. Here the affect of home visiting involves crossing boundaries and having the experience of different sensory exposure in possible sights, smells and language. Best practice dictates that the social work student interprets the emotional arena they find themselves in and it is important to acknowledge this and preparing well.



Home Visiting from a statutory Child & Family Service social worker's perspective, John's views.

Click to View: <https://youtu.be/W6D8BGWNoRM>

In this video John shares his practice wisdom regarding a long career in social work and home visiting. He brings to the fore a number of points regarding preparation, content and follow-up. Beginning the conversation by asking "Do you know why I'm here?" or "This is the reason I'm visiting today. Does that make sense to you?" will give a clear indication as to how the first visit will proceed and a good indication to the social work student, how their next set of open questions will follow.

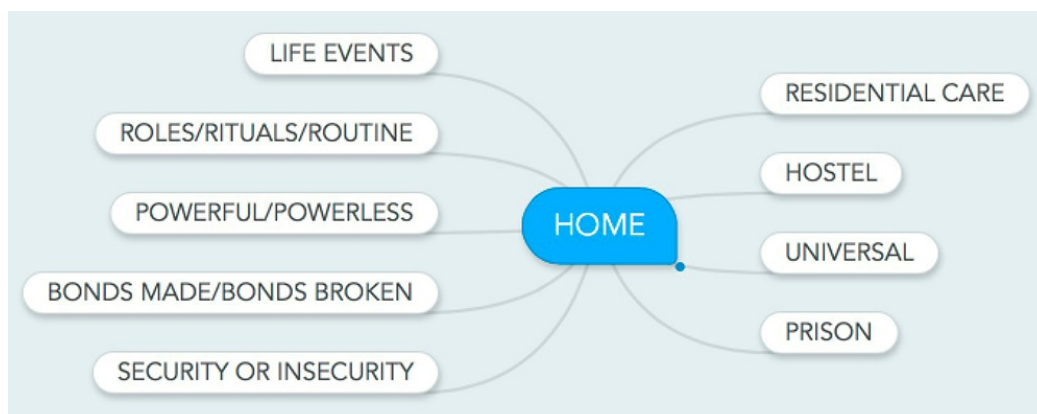


Figure 1: MSW Yr. 2 students illustrates their perceptions of 'home'.

It is interesting that 'home' for some families or individuals can be short or long term prison cells, temporary hostel accommodation or residential based care. For the social work home visitor, regardless of environment, certain characteristics are common; the expectation of safety, boundaries, confidentiality and in some cases, ethical challenges (Allen & Tracy, 2013). Without labouring the pedagogical basis for fieldwork practice (of which home visiting can be a significant element) Shulman (2005) attests that 'accountable talk is one feature of signature pedagogies. The student must build on what somebody before has said; he or she must respond, must offer counterargument, new data and cogent commentary' (p.22). For home visiting all this takes place for the worker while in the environment of someone else's home.

Social workers are trained in a well defined, multi-system approach where links can be made between the situational and the personal. If working from a strengths perspective approach, students can focus on home visiting with confidence as it allows them to discard their 'opinion' in return for a solution focused, strengths based platform. Additionally it is interesting for the student to consider how they perceive their concept of 'home' and how this might differ from the service users view of home.

Gray and Price, in their 2014 study of offering home visits as support to pre-natal women with a history of mental health difficulties state:

'that social workers, who are experienced practitioners who work extensively within authentic community contexts, are in an optimal position to lead evidence informed practice implementation responsive to the needs and capacity challenges within low-income communities. As social workers, we possess skills that enable us to recognize the inherent strengths of the individual, within context of the family and the social environment' (Gray & Price, 2014 p. 70).

This leads us to realise that it is through the home visit that the dynamic context of the person in their environment can be captured.

The following video presents an MSW Yr. 2 student on her final placement talking about her experience of home visiting



MSW Yr. 2 student Aisling, on placement in a child protection service shares her views on home visiting

Click to View: <https://youtu.be/7Ecr--aGeVg>

Home visiting shows itself in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes and to serve a variety of needs for individuals and families. For the student going out on a home visit, this can be both daunting and exciting. Ferguson's (2011) renowned book *Child Protection Practice*, provides great detail regarding home visiting and its central role in respect of child protection social work. His introductory guidance concerns preparation, process and procedure in carrying out the task, with additional advice on getting inside the front door, interaction and dynamics and multi-organisational working. The entire agenda for the business of home visiting begins back at the office. Ferguson's (2011) publication has been useful in informing this 'Get' list for the home visiting beginner:

Get the referral. Get your brain in gear. Get yourself organised.

Get to the home. Be punctual, get a watch.

Get out your I.D. for inspection.

Get into the home.

Get the individual or family to start making a connection with you.

Get access to see and talk with any persons connected with the referral.

Get to see around the home (if the referral has a protection element see persons, kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, gardens).

Get to understand and acknowledge with the family that this home visit might be a difficult situation for all.

Get out.

Get back to the office.

Get support for yourself if needed.

Get to record the visit as soon as possible, memories do not last forever.

Get to thinking about possible multi-discipline engagement.

Get down on paper what you want to discuss with your Practice Teacher in your next supervision session.

Acquiring support and insight into the experience through supervision is crucial. This is an adapted story of how one student, who from the beginning, got things wrong.

MSW student Mary was given a referral by her practice teacher. The home visit was then pre planned by the student by sending out a letter to the family involved. The morning of the visit came, Mary decided to cycle to the house. She got to the house, knocked on the door and didn't get a reply. She didn't know what to do next as most of her thoughts had been on what she would do and say when she got inside the door. She knocked on the door again. She heard a noise inside. The door still didn't open. She knocked again. Twenty minutes later Mary is still outside the door with all her open and closed questions, strategies and theories inside her head and now decides she will leave. She had parked her bike around the corner near the house where she had hoped to do the home visit. Her bike was gone! Stolen! She reaches into her bag, no phone! In her haste and anxiety about the home visit she has forgotten to bring her phone or the office phone. She decides to get the bus back. She walks to the bottom of the road to the bus stop. She reaches into her bag again and ... no money! Again all her waking thoughts had been on how she would conduct the home visit and she left her purse in the drawer of her desk in the office. It starts to rain and here comes a cross looking dog.

Mary's experience of doing her first home visit is the opening discussion for her supervision session that afternoon. It begins with the practice teacher saying, "Well Mary, how are you? Tell me about the home visit you went on this morning?" During this supervisory session the practice teacher and Mary go on to explore areas of personal safety, preparation, context and deliberations around what Mary would do differently and

proposed actions regarding non compliant visits.

Seeing home visiting as a strategy for service delivery also opens up its weaknesses and limitations.

Many students value their own 'likeable' quality. This can be quickly dashed in a home visit where the front door remains firmly closed. Furthermore, students often in their ambition to be helpful, click into 'fix' mode instead of their 'facilitator' mode and often strive to offer as many resources as they can recollect during a home visit session. This can result in unrealistic and unobtainable goals for all concerned. Critics of home visiting might suggest that depending on the culture of the agency, home visiting can be limited and uncreative, it can be curtailed by travel expense restrictions, professional jealousies and agency policy. Research by Littell *et al.* (2005), Weiss (1993) and Kadushin & Egan (2001) point to insufficiencies, limitations and ethical dilemmas cautioning us against this approach as a panacea.

Olive Stevenson spans a forty year career with her research on social work dilemmas and family work. She states, '....social workers are not and never have been trained to be 'miniature psychoanalysts' exploring the deeper reaches of fantasy life, but rather to recognize, as it were, the little pieces of the iceberg which show above the surface in order to help the child handle better the realities of the situation' (Stevenson 1963, p. 13). Whereas it is appropriate that social work students are not trained to be 'mini psychoanalysts', they are trained to look around and below any 'icebergs' defining their approach to individuals or families. This analogy fits well with the Slide presentation at the end of this chapter, as it explores the metaphor of the depths of the rocky waters in home visiting beset by possible icebergs. The ice-berg parallel which shows itself above the surface may present as behaviours or language during a home visit and it is imperative that metaphorically the social worker in training looks both above and below for the complete picture.

Home Visiting and Power

The theme of power and power relations in social work is a major one. Authors such as Smith (2008; 2014) and Tew (2006) have written excellent accessible overviews for social work that emphasise the complexities of power and power imbalances. Additional authors such as Hasenfield, (1987); Hugman, (1991); Kadushin & Harkness, (2002) and Payne, (2014) are equally important in this area. Power can be both positive or negative, power can be identified at all levels, **everyone has some power and no one has none**. In the instance of home visiting the reality can be reflected that more power lies with the service user than if the interaction takes place within the social work office. This is mainly due to the fact that with home visiting, the social worker is within the

client's own territory. However, in terms of visiting for 'regulatory' purposes, for example, in child protection cases, the power may reside with the social worker as representative of the statutory agency.

In the hospital setting individuals can be seen at their most vulnerable and least powerful. Although not within the usual definition of 'home', the clinical social worker student while visiting patients at their bedside is reminded to consider the imbalance of the power dynamic in this situation. Students on placement may be interested in comparing their approaches, verbal and non-verbal in hospital clinical settings as opposed to community 'home' settings.

The observational skills needed to do this clinical type of visit are as astute and relevant as those pertaining to any other social work home visiting.

Geraldine McEleney is a Clinical Social Worker and Practice Teacher at University College Hospital, Galway. In a podcast made for MSW students she stressed the overarching point for students to appreciate the vulnerability of interviewing people possibly at their most vulnerable. This may include patients attending Day hospitals or lying in a bed and only wearing their nightclothes. This practice teacher suggests three significant points made for students to consider with regard to a patient referral on the ward:

1. Consider where the patient is placed on the ward, this will indicate possible relevance to immediacy of medical condition. Liaise with nurses or medical staff before approaching the patient. Do you need a mask or an apron?
2. What indicators can you see with regard to the patient; appearance; what's on the bedside locker etc.? Is there any suggestion they have family or someone from the community visiting?
3. Consider the environment. How much privacy is there? Will this effect confidentiality levels? Does the patient have special needs/hard of hearing etc./ need assisted technology? Are there cultural differences?

The important issue is to be aware of the multiple layers of power at play in every situation. From their perspective in home visiting, how can the student recognise, dissipate or lessen the power dynamic? On placement, social work students can find themselves in positions of power and that power can be used positively and constructively to help service users gain greater control over their lives. That power can also be used inappropriately and destructively in the form of abuse, exploitation and/or the reinforcement of existing disadvantage (Thompson, 2015).

Outside of the therapeutic arena other power dynamics are worth noting. In particular the power of organisational construct. This, in part, is the culture of the organisation in relation to, for example, how the agency commits to social work student education, their direction on case allocation, case management, reimbursement of expenses, office seating arrangements, or the position of the agency as a powerful central element in social work education.

The reflection within supervision for the student and practice teacher can encompass the various power dynamics evident in home visiting and in particular the approach of care or control . Control can be seen as power and power can be strength, it is all relevant to the way in which it is used. Students therefore need to use their language, professional identity and training to surmount or balance what can be seen as an unequal relationship but which can, if directed and acknowledged lead to growth and understanding.

Home Visiting: The Reluctant welcome

There may be anxiety on behalf of the student going into placement with regard to working with reluctant or involuntary service users. On the contrary there may also be some students who chose aspects of working with involuntary clients as one of their learning needs.

Maggie Kindred in her 2011 book *A Practical Guide to Working with Reluctant Clients in Health and Social Care* suggests an interesting quiz for students. See if you can answer 'yes', 'no' or 'it depends' to the following statements:

People need to take risks to learn how to manage risks.

A woman prisoner should not be allowed to have a baby.

I agree with the practice of circumcision.

It is ok for some religions to prohibit same-sex relationships.

Having faith helps mentally ill people to get better.

When the client accepts the service which has been imposed on him or her, there is a better chance of success.

I do not think this book will change my basic beliefs.

It is important to find out the truth about things and challenge clients who lie.

Compelling people to accept treatment does not really work, except to protect others.

Most parents who abuse their children are reluctant to accept help.

If you have answered 'yes' or 'no' to most of the statements Kindred says you demonstrate firm and somewhat unchanging beliefs. Where do you think these beliefs and values come from and what would it take for you to change your beliefs and values? If you answered mostly 'it depends' you show analytical skills or is that you want to be noncommittal or don't really have any opinion? (Kindred, 2011)

Confucious says that to understand others we must first understand ourselves (Wu-Chi, 1955). Working with reluctant service users can make us feel nervous, annoyed, threatened and not in control. It may be something in the tone or construction of language, physical appearance, the living environment of the service user that makes us uncomfortable. At times there may be no way to guard against interacting with people who do not want to interact with you. Ruch (2007) recognises that social workers can feel vulnerable and disempowered at times during their day to day work but in her writings on emotional listening she offers the following advice, 'Emotional listening' transforms experiences of fear, anxiety, anger and frustration into 'a resource for practice rather than a reason for disengagement' (Ruch, 2007, p. 376). She promotes the building of relationships in an effort to help social workers, individuals and families gain the best outcome from the collective encounter. For the social work student and practice teacher there is much to consider in Ruch's research.

Evidence of the necessity to encourage relationship building is vital where the social work student is for example, placed in a probation service for the field work practicum. In this situation service users can be visited both in their own homes or in prisons. As early as 1931, Chinn explored the complexities of attending to service users who were involuntary, stating that he wanted to show initially why there was the need for systematic home visitation and secondly an exploration into indicating what were the specific factors necessary to successful home visiting (Chinn, 1931). Home visiting within the probation service more recently has been evidenced within the work of Nellis & Chui, (2003) and McWilliams, (1985). The English probation history of visiting individuals in their homes as an appendage of the law enforcement system, has made a considerable journey from the initial history of probation officers opening up their own homes to probationers for respite and refuge (Latrope, 1905).

In an interview conducted with an Irish Probation officer (Mary) the point is made that the 'involuntary' nature of these home visits may be

seen by the client as unnecessary or overly intrusive but interestingly clients can also be relieved and grateful seeing probation as the easier option and a way to avoid a more severe sanction. Role clarification and purpose of visit are two fundamental functions of the Probation officer. Checking safety levels and/or history of the client is paramount while considering a 'joint visit' with another co-worker may be necessary. Some family homes can be chaotic – noise levels, people numbers etc. and it is important for the student on the Probation placement to establish boundaries. Often families may be grateful for the order that a Probation visit can bring. In all, these visits should be seen as purposeful and not just the taking place of a social conversation.

It is inaccurate to presuppose that where an individual or family are termed 'involuntary' that they are therefore threatening, intimidating or bullying. Not all involuntary individuals or families display these characteristics. In all social work interaction the words of **awareness, knowledge, flexibility** and **sensitivity** are paramount in self reflection and use of self. Ask yourself this question - In any difficult interaction what verbal or non-verbal behaviour am I exhibiting?

Do I have the courage to stop any interaction if the service user's behaviour is threatening? Some people may not have voluntarily chosen to be service users, for example, prisoners or involuntary mental health patients. Here their defined term of being 'reluctant or involuntary clients' is defined by others - What do you think of this term? In all of this discussion where is the evidence that this form of social work delivery in the guise of home visiting works? Roberts *et al.* (1998) and Neivar *et al.* (2010) in a meta-analysis of home visiting programs for at-risk families, examined differences in the effects of programs on maternal behaviour.

'On average, programs with more frequent visitation had higher success rates. The frequency of home visits explained significant variance of effect sizes among studies in the United States, with two visits per month predicting a small, substantive effect. Intensive programs or programs with at least three visits per month were more than twice as effective as were less intensive programs. Home visiting programs using nurses or mental health professionals as providers were not significantly more effective than were programs using paraprofessionals. In general, programs showed a positive effect on maternal behavior, but programs with frequent home visits were more successful' (Neivar *et al.* 2010 p. 499).

Home visiting in itself is not the only answer to service delivery for vulnerable sections of the population. In a review and analysis of six different targeted home visiting programmes Gomby *et al.* (1999) found that results varied in outcomes, some home visiting interventions were of benefit but predictions of benefit success for families was not easily identifiable. Furthermore, the delivery of the home visiting programmes were hampered for a number of agency and resource reasons. The way forward may be for social work home visiting not to be offered as a single

service but in conjunction with other health service personnel, for example, social care staff, family support workers, community nurses, addiction support counsellors.

Jo is a Social Care Manager and has been part of a social work team for a number of years.



Joint visiting Social Care and Social Work: Jo shares his experiences.

Click on this link to listen and view Jo's podcast. <https://youtu.be/JVf2H-jXnJw>

Home Visiting: Foster care home visits

'In order to promote developmental outcomes with children and younger people and to nurture their positive health and well-being in foster care, social workers and case managers are required to direct professional attention toward both the child or young person and her/his daily living environment(s) - at home, at school and in the local neighbourhoods in which they live' (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011, p. 19)

Foster care home visiting lends itself to a specialist type of service delivery. Whereas many of the basic elements and skills of mandatory home visiting are present, for foster care home visiting, there are further additional dimensions divergent from the norm. With foster care, the social worker sees and makes an assessment and report of a child/children not in their birth residence but usually in a home where they have been placed. The social work visit to the home has therefore a variety of purpose, not only to take in many aspects of observing the child or young person to be in a safe, nurturing, supervised and developmental environment but to also take in the role and possible concerns of the foster parent who has opened up their home to the child

or young person. It is for the training social worker to make connections between these two frameworks.

Patricia, as a foster care social worker, understands the service she provides and presents the elements within this following podcast of her home visiting practice.



Patricia: A Foster Care Social Worker shares her experiences of home visiting

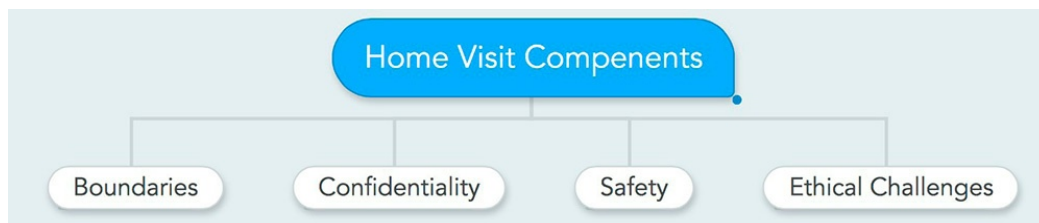
Click to View Patricia's Podcast: https://www.youtube.com/edit?o=U&video_id=7GIe99hSg1k

Foster care social workers acknowledge that 'permanency planning needs to focus on each child's sense of belonging, first of all to people, to a place they call home and to a cultural identity' (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011, p. 22). Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory it can be suggested that the job of the foster care social worker and the job which a social work student might perform can be dissected into various roles: (1) The Microsystem Role: here the focus is on the day to day events and care in the home at times predicated by legal, regulatory or agency practices. For the social work student this type of referral suggests that the student is required to do a home visit to gain further information if the child wishes to stay overnight in a different place or the birth parents wish to visit the child. (2) The Mesosystem Role: this is where the referral brings the student into connection with a wider group of people. This visit may not necessarily be to the child's foster home but possibly to a school or child's friend home. This role can move the student away from direct work with fostered individuals and their foster families and bring them into a more indirect avenue of working with birth parents or 'behind the scenes' work in order to build competencies and capabilities. (3) The Exosystem Role: For the most part students on placement do not have capacity to be engaged in this area of

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model which encompasses care team and organisational management. They can however, view from afar and in their considerations during supervision, gain the knowledge and critique of the local management system in how a foster care service is managed and delivered. (4) The Macrosystem: Again this may be an academic exercise for the student in looking at regional, state and cultural dimensions of foster care. However, it is a worthwhile topic for supervision if the student has already worked on a case at the micro level. Questions to be asked by the practice teacher such as 'What is the law that underpins this case?' 'What should the State offer in terms of after care to an 18year old leaving foster care?' 'Why would somebody want to be a foster parent?' 'If you were a foster parent and the child or young person in your care was being disruptive how would you feel? What would you do?'

Home visiting for foster care social workers and their students requires specialist knowledge and a delicacy in communication and interaction. It raises basic questions 'When is a home, a home? What makes a home? When is a home not a home?' These are simple, basic, important and interesting questions which can arise for the student in a social work foster team placement.

Home Visiting: Rural



Discussed within the studies of Pugh, (2007; 2003; 2000) the above elements make up the general considerations within home visiting. For rural home visiting here are additional aspects : These include Distance

Education

Culture

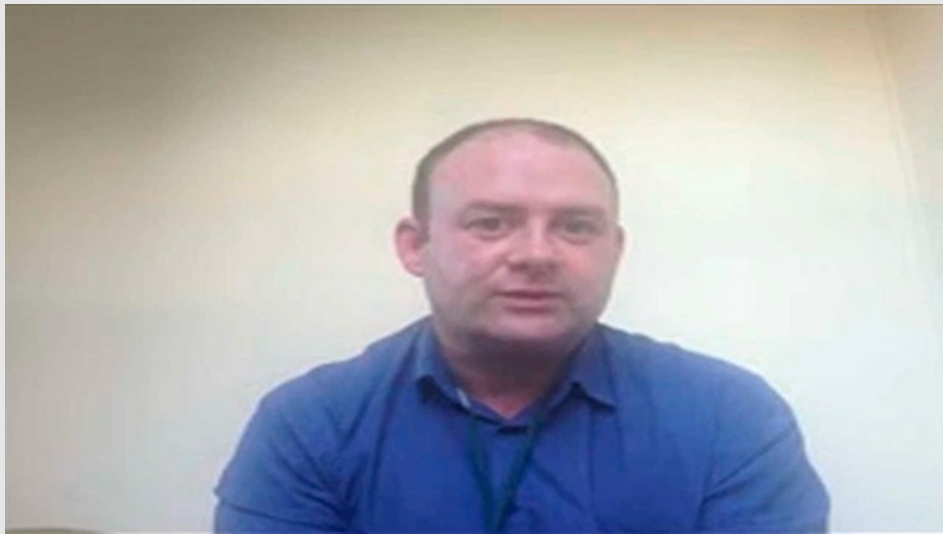
Housing

Transport

Language

Difference

Derek is a social worker in the Oughterard, County Galway (Ireland) Children and Family Services office, which has statutory responsibility for children at risk. The social work office in Oughterard is in one of the small towns of this region. Derek's working patch is a distinctly beautiful geographical region, west of the main University town of Galway, bordering the sea coast and the region is usually referred to as Connemara. The population statistics are 32,000 (Census, 2011). In the following podcast he shares his experiences of rural home visiting.



An Insight into Rural Social Work by Derek

Click to View Derek's short video. https://youtu.be/Zc2r_TR_uWo

Research suggests people are linked in communities both by external and internal connections. That internal ties are built on generational knowledge and the external links include the influence and importance of the wider environment and society. The interplay of these two platforms discern how a community will function (Cheers, 1998; Martinez-Brawley, 2000).

Although rural social work is not a vastly popular area of research, a number of articles have appeared in the past number of years from Australia (Mendes & Binns, 2013; Green & Mason, 2002), USA (Belanger & Stone, 2008; Templeman & Mitchell, 2002) and Canada (Brownlee *et al.* 2010). In all of the research papers, concerns for rural populations and their social work service discuss such areas as transport, access to services, social isolation and limited educational opportunities. In addition there can also be challenges around poverty, unemployment, low pay, substandard or transient housing and an ever increasing ageing population. For the home visiting social worker the delight of working in

a beautiful scenic area may be well offset by community problems of elderly isolation, mental health and child abuse in lonely, sparse, inaccessible or remote areas. Krieg (2001) in researching a list of skills and qualities found among a number of social workers working in rural Australian practices found that social workers triggered the ability to become more skilful in the absence of resources, working outside the usual service hours, showing potential in being more creative and using lateral thinking skills. They were more tactful, competent in multi-tasking and showed tenacity and adaptability with a willingness to be able to change and learn (p. 91). Further research has shown that this may be offset by irregular supervision, lack of timely assistance, decreased variety of resources, frustration at being a possible secondary referral point and the exposure of working and living in the same community (Turbett, 2004, p. 988)

Resource deficiencies, distance from main services, the worry of child abuse, child neglect, difficult adolescent behaviours, suicidal ideation and a collection of disability and elderly problems are not exclusive to either rural or urban communities but in the case of remote regions problems can be exacerbated by space and time. The lessons learned from difficult rural social work situations such as those experienced on the Orkney Islands in Scotland, England (Turbett, 2004) and the challenges in a rural setting of adequate mental health services (Dean *et al.* 2012), the rural elderly (Manthorp & Stevens, 2010) and child welfare (Landsman, 2002) show a challenge to designers and managers of services to contemplate the unique difference between city and country populations (Strolin-Goltzman *et al.* 2008).

The impact of geographic location and distance is indeed significant but language, its context and use, for rural social workers and their students is vitally important. Are there additional complications where a different language is spoken in a rural or remote region to the general population in the city or town? Is it important to place social work students and employed social workers in services where they can ably converse in the language of the region?

Aoife is a social worker who, like Derek, works in the Connemara, County Galway region (Pop. approx. 32,000; area 192,144 land hectares). In this region there are resident native Irish (Gaelic) speakers as well as those who speak English as their first language. Aoife finds her dual language abilities an asset within her work.



Rural Social Worker Aoife : Home Visiting in Two Languages

Click to View: <https://youtu.be/BO488hNqERI>

job satisfaction and life-work balance were the most important factors in staying in rural social work jobs

The Irish speaking section of this video sees Aoife suggesting that it is important to speak the first language of the recipients of the service even if it is only a “cupla focail” translated as a “couple of words”. People she says appreciate the effort. One of the interesting

situations in this region is that often young children of two, three or four years of age may not speak any English having only Irish speaking parents and possibly going to all Irish speaking play or pre-schools. The same may apply for elderly people in this community, who by generational culture and tradition, speak only Irish. Aoife’s experience is that she can achieve better relationships by being bi-lingual and by making the service user more comfortable in their own language. She suggests in speaking Irish that individuals and families feel she understands their culture and their way of life better.

Retaining bi-lingual social workers like Aoife is vital. In the American study Strolin-Goltzman *et al.* (2008) consider four areas; job satisfaction, life-work balance, job supports and salary/benefits, across urban, rural and suburban child welfare service regions. In all, the greatest indicator precipitating job change was the level of social work qualification but the more interesting finding was that job satisfaction and life-work balance were the most important factors in staying in rural social work jobs even before job supports or salary/benefits.

In summary, there are differences between students on rural social work placements and their city equivalents. A short list compiled by NUIG/MSW Yr. 2 students who compared their rural based placement with a previous urban based one, made the following notes:

- Office is in a populated area so time to get out to rural homes was greater.
- The pace of life or cultural differences for individuals or families living in the country was different than those living in the city.
- More inter generations lived in one house.
- Access to additional services were more challenging e.g. allied health professional; speech & occupational therapy.
- Finances and access to employment opportunities were scarce.
- Emigration within families was common.

In the past, studies by Hobbs & Chang (1996) and Morris (1995) recognised that social work urban models of intervention were inappropriate for rural communities and felt that the use of such models minimised, rather than maximised, the assets of rural families. These are important issues for social work students, not only in an effort to increase their awareness of how space, time and region can influence practice but also how culture is a relevant consideration in both urban and rural settings.

Home visiting: Cultural competence : Out of the classroom and into the community

‘For some families, ethnic, racial, religious and cultural considerations are to the forefront. For others it is important information but not central in the family’s worldview’ (Ginsberg, 2007, p. 63).

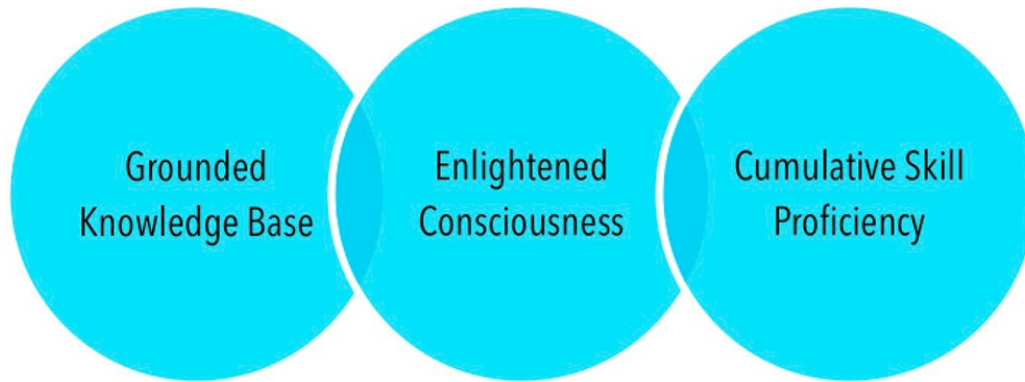
Understand difference, challenges the student to take the discussion on cultural competence out of the classroom and into the community. Boyle and Springer (2001) maintain that there are hundreds of conceptual definitions of cultural competence and related rhetoric such as ethnic-sensitive, cross culturalism and multi cultural practice and these do little to explain its complexity. Some families may not be of the local ethnic majority but for them, their upbringing and values may have been illicited from that predominant culture in that region. These families may therefore not see themselves as culturally different or if they do, it is not intrinsic to their existence. Simply, culture can be seen as the sum total of life patterns passed from generation to generation within a group

of people (Dean, 2001) or the still relevant explanation of culture, 'that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1871, p.16).

Students bring their academic knowledge on cultural diversity to the 'coal-face' of placement. For them it is a reconsideration of words such as; **respecting difference, recognising cultural strengths and maintaining a valued stance on individuality**. They remember that the 'ethnic-sensitive social worker' was considered to be conscious of the effect ethnicity or social class had on presenting issues and proposed solutions (O'Connor, 1996; Lock & Faubert, 2003; Devore & Schlesinger, 1999) and they can reiterate that some of the most interesting research papers on person-in-the-family and diverse and competent social work practice have been written by Fong (1997), Fong *et al.* (1999) and Lum (2003). Students will also have had access to Lum's (2003) paper, asserting that culture identity must be recognised as 'a source of strength but also a factor contributing to inequality, injustice and oppression' (Lum, 2003, p. 345).

Why then, beyond common respect for the individual or families is it important for students to be sensitive to the differences of race and culture? The answer is that every person is different, every family is different and by the same token, on placement every home visit will be different. Basic interpretations of, for example, child discipline, child rearing, interpretations of abuse, verbal or non-verbal rituals are all important practices to understand. There is one clear message 'When in doubt ask'. It is hoped that students can convert their knowledge and cultural awareness into effective and appropriate interventions and it is important for practice teachers to help students in this regard.

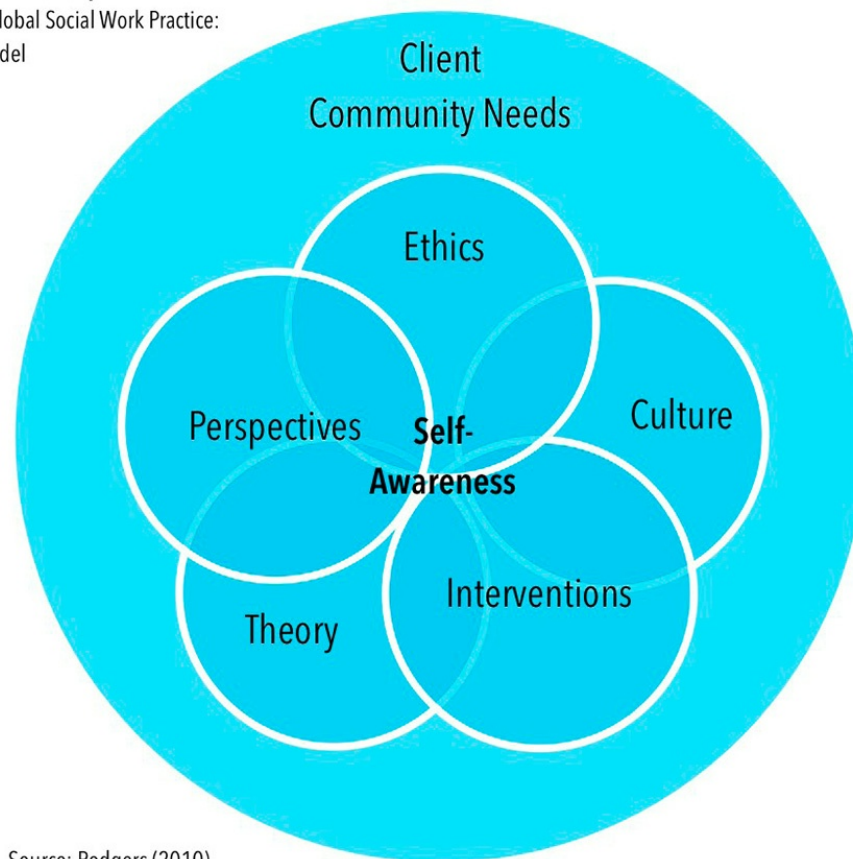
The McPhatter model (1997) is of use within an initial supervisory session plainly setting out the elements that are important. Dolan *et al.* (2006) assert that within supervision the student can best reflect on what beliefs, knowledge, values and attitudes they bring from their own familial or societal experiences. This is to inform their practice and explore with the practice teacher their views and the service agency's approach to sensitive issues and situations. The student could be asked by the Practice Teacher 'What do you know about this ethnic group?' "Where or who can you ask for the information you need?" "What approach will you take on your home visit?" "Is there anything in your own background or attitudes that might inform how you think about this case?"



Adapted from McPhatter, 1997

Mc Phatter's (1997) cultural Competence Attainment Model was developed in response to the overrepresentation of racially and culturally diverse children in the USA child welfare system. It further recognised the obligation of child welfare practitioners to provide culturally agreeable interventions to achieve their aim of safeguarding the best interests of children, families and communities. As is evident, the model comprises of a grounded knowledge base, an enlightened consciousness and a subsequent cumulative skill proficiency (Mc Phatter, 1997, p. 225). The lesson in this diagram for students is that when awareness, empathy and a genuine openness to 'difference' are adopted, students' attitudes and overall conduct are more accepting and effective in personal cross-cultural interactions. This is a good platform to use for practice teachers to teach on cultural identity within supervision which is a safe space where students can voice their opinions and learn from the practice wisdom of their supervisors. Students cannot know everything about all cultures and even if their knowledge is extensive they should be dissuaded from generalising from one person or family to another even though they may be of similar ethnic backgrounds.

Rodger's (2010) Kaleidoscope Model
Competencies in Global Social Work Practice:
A Kaleidoscope Model



Source: Rodgers (2010)

One of the most interesting pieces of research on cultural competencies is Rodger's (2010) Kaleidoscope Model. Its conception of cultural competence fundamentally suggests that practitioners engage in critical thinking and are empathetic toward the diverse perspectives of others. The Kaleidoscope model views social work at a global level putting self awareness as a basic aspect to achieving practice competency. Students are familiar with the importance of self awareness and at its heart, this model examines one's own cultural identity and its impact upon values and judgements. It suggests culture is awarded a proportionate space in the achievement of good social work practice (Rodgers, 2010). In all, it encompasses anti-oppressive practice, human rights and social justice and ethical perspectives. For the student it is holistically couched alongside a base of theory and perspectives which in sum can only help the practice teacher and student towards better decision making practices. Cultural competence within social work is about providing a culturally responsive service to a multicultural population. Cultural competence is defined by social workers as respecting diversity, gaining self awareness and the ability to effectively meet the clients' needs through clear communication and informed assessment. **Cultural awareness in itself can be a fluid and evolving concept for the student**, it starts with being asked by the practice teacher "What do you think of this ethnic group?" "What has informed this opinion?" "Do you

have any past experience?”

Being culturally aware and helping students in particular to build capacity in their own culturally aware practice has a knock-on effect for the future of newly qualified social workers and their personal self efficacy ratings (Carpenter *et al.* 2015). Developing competency and improving self belief transposes itself into employment, as the clearer social workers are about what they do in their work, the more confidence they have in their abilities. This begins with learning good planning and delivery techniques and practice, practice, practice in placement.

This table (Figure 3) offers guidelines for Practice Teachers and Students in Supervision where a case has a cultural dimension.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN PRACTICE				
Report taking/Report reading	What is the appropriate response?	What is the appropriate level of intervention?	Whose and what criteria have been used to determine the needs here?	What do you know of the individual or family's expectations? Is there evidence of any cultural clashes? Any differing perspectives of what is expected?
Safety and Risk Assessment	Do you know of any cultural differences pertaining to this case in basic areas such as parenting, death rituals, religious differences?	What might be the basis for any cultural conflict?	What is the potential for harm if there are cultural differences?	What personal and professional measures might you suggest to safeguard your own safety?
Family Assessment	Do you know the indiv/family history? How might you find this out?	How will this help you in your assessment?	Does the indiv/family know how certain outcomes might affect them?	How will you help the indiv/family to bring about change?

Case Planning and Implementation	How much will the indiv/family be involved in the development of a case plan?	Can you help the indiv/family to define what they can do for themselves and what they might need help with?	Are the goals reasonable and achievable? Are there time frames?	Are services accessible, available and culturally appropriate?
Evaluation of Progress and Closure	Have any safety issues been resolved? What criteria was used in assessing the reduction of risk?	How far is this indiv/family in achieving their goals?	What is the indiv/family's perception of the services being provided? How have their own abilities to improved changed?	What additional supports may be needed to encourage and sustain for the future the indiv/family?

(McGovern, 2012)

Students from minority groups face considerable challenges as they learn human service practice in the dominant culture

Limitations: The usual elements of time constrains, bureaucratic measures and lack of resources can impede culturally responsive interventions. It requires agencies to encompass the ideal and be encouraged by strong leadership. It is imperative for students to gain greater

awareness of 'Culture' whether it is their own culture, someone else's culture or the agency's culture. In extending their knowledge, they will in turn be developing a 'process' competence (Rothman, 2007). On placement for students and their practice teachers this process results in the evolvement of better understanding of communities, the ability to ask when in doubt and the 'doing' with respect.

The emphasis from the research is mainly on cultural competence from the perspective of the social work professional and the service user. While there is a dearth of research relating to the possible cultural difference between practice teacher and student, Cleak and Wilson (2013) explain, 'age, gender and race can impact on the supervisory relationship, particularly if one person has characteristics that are less socially valued. Similarly, students from minority groups face considerable challenges as they learn human service practice in the dominant culture' (p. 151). The base line is human rights and social justice for all, respecting difference and diversity. Grey and Smart (2008) suggest cultural difference can be considered under the headings of *Individualism*: In some cultures being singularly responsible is valued. Politically the view of 'there is no society only the individual' may in some cultures suggest individual empowerment.

This is not a worldwide view and in gaining insight around cultural competence, areas of values, customs or religious beliefs must be considered. *Spirituality*: There is for many, a difference between religion and spirituality and for some the two are intrinsically linked. Learning about faiths and values as they uphold or lead to a better understanding of the person or family is relevant. *Family*: There is no such thing as the average family or the 'usual' family that attends social work services. How some families carry on their lives may be challenging for students and confuse their idea of 'normal'. Discussion within supervision will help the student to explore some of these issues. *Boundaries*: Physical, mental, emotional, are some examples of collective areas where students need to pay attention before any home visiting takes place. Considering the appropriateness of a handshake? What behaviours in this culture are traditionally acceptable but not easy to talk about? With regard to supervision it is worthwhile to discuss early on in the relationship between practice teacher and student any cultural differences that are apparent either within the caseload or evident between practice teacher and student themselves. Assumptions and perceptions are important here, honesty, fairness and even a sense of humour can reflect good teaching and learning skills.

Home Visiting: The Virtual World of Pre-placement Training

In general the traditional principle in social work education has been that students practice the skills learned in the classroom by going on placement which in most instances includes visiting the individual or family in their home. Interactions are then discussed within the supervision framework. The growing pace of technology and its various applications have shunted practicing social workers 'to be able to operate effectively within a fast changing societal and practice context in which core communication modes are shifting to encompass increasing levels of virtual contact and practice' (Rafferty & Waldman, 2006, p. 19). The use of simulation techniques within health service education is not new and for many medical courses has been in evidence over the last number of years (Ahern & Wink, 2010; Baker *et al.* 2009; Boulos *et al.* 2007; Cook *et al.* 2009). With regard to social work, in some countries it would appear that the actual physical opportunity for students to engage with individuals and families within their homes may be lessening. In an American context, as previously explained, this is possibly due to 'changes in licensing requirements, insurance reimbursement limits on who can provide billable services to clients, cases that are seen as too complex for students and limited supervisory resources' (Wilson *et al.* 2013 p. 434). Given this phenomenon, a changing role in the context of social work education may be dawning (Jarman-Rohde *et al.* 1997; Levine & Adams, 2013). Interestingly, a number of social work courses have

moved towards the virtual world to try and offer training to students. The emerging role of what could be seen as applied virtual learning in a social work setting is both ingenious and reflective of its time.

Screen shots of CWRU Virtual Training Programme:



Figure 4: Social Worker avatar in the kitchen with seated client avatar.

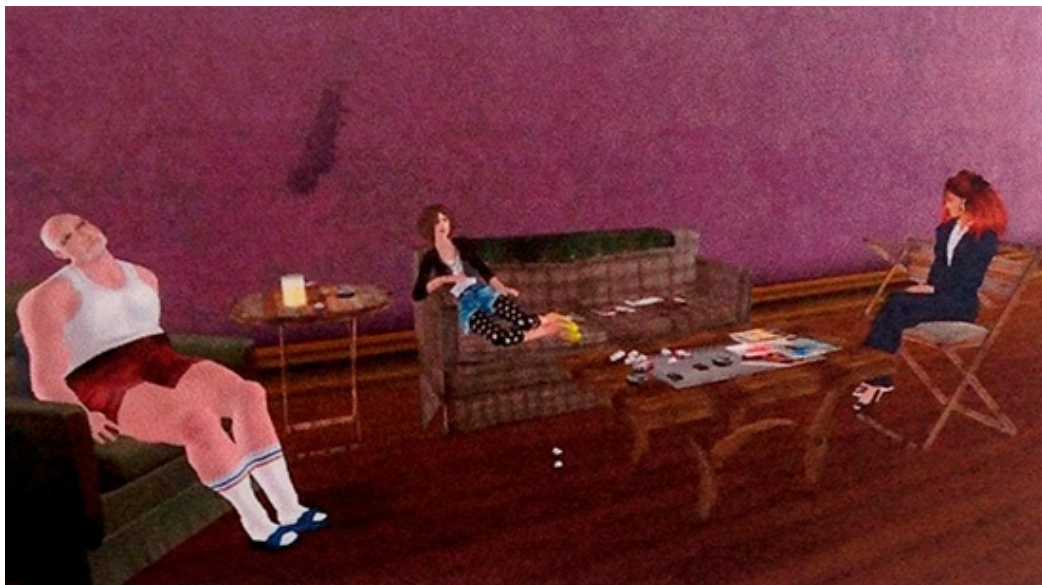
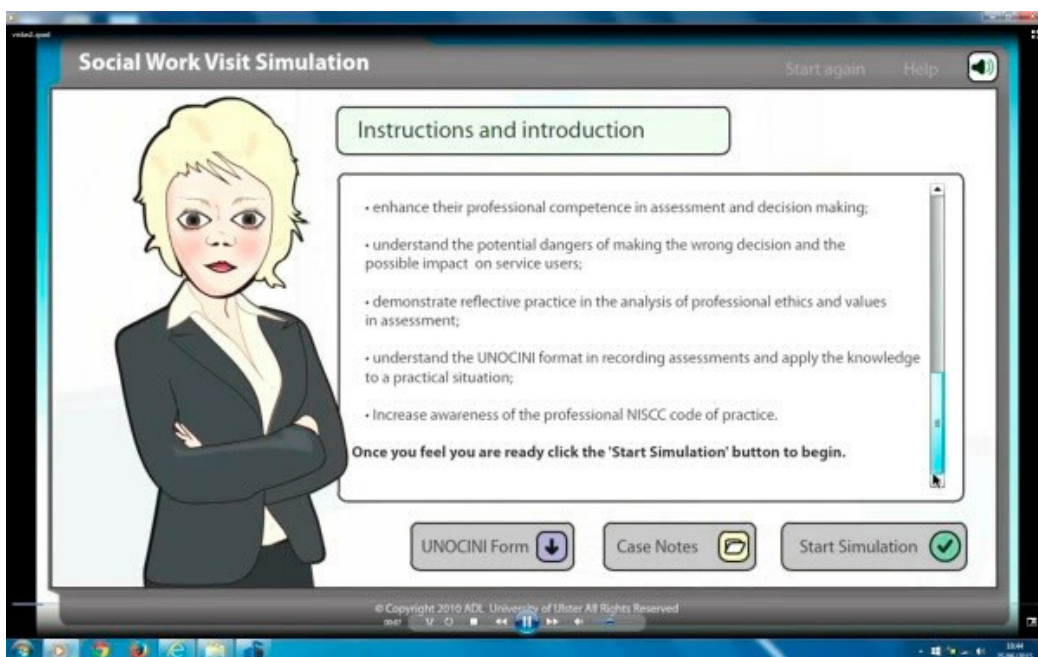
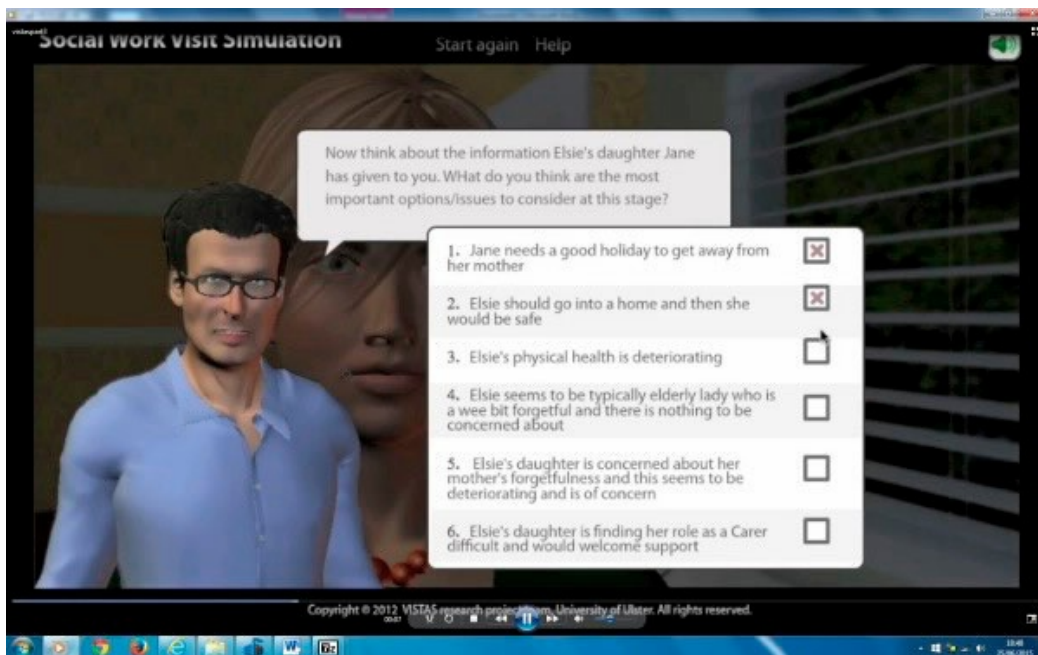


Figure 5: Social Worker, (seated in chair), client (seated on couch), and scripted avatar (seated on lounge chair) in the living room.

The two pictures here are screen shots of a web based simulated home visiting module used in a foundation MSW direct practice course. In an effort to try and help their students develop better practice skills educators in Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA, social work educators have developed an on-screen virtual simulation of a home visit (Wilson *et al.* 2013). Their research discussion suggests that 'the instructors and students who participated in this initiative reported

that participation in the web-based home visiting simulation added important learning and skill development opportunities that would not have been possible without access to the virtual simulation' (Wilson *et al.* 2013, p. 433). Also in Case Western Reserve University under a research fellowship programme they have begun to develop further integrated educational tools. In one course design students were encouraged to pre-view educational videos prior to class time, partake in collective conferencing and use Google Drive Documents and Applications in an effort to build and promote an on-line, in-house learning community.

Screen shots of UU Virtual Training Programme:



The Social Work team at Ulster University, Northern Ireland in conjunction with Dr Anne Campbell Queens University Belfast, Northern Ireland, have developed a simulated risk assessment for child care/ child protection and assimilated risk assessment for adult/ dementia care for its professional social work training course (McColgan, 2015). These were developed in partnership with the University Access, Digital and Distributed Learning Team and Service Users. This resource provided students with the opportunity to undertake social work risk assessments of two virtual families in separate virtual environments. This takes the form of an animated social worker presenting herself /himself into a home visiting situation. The student is given the scenario and possible action choices on-screen. The student is then asked to assess and choose a response. On clicking the on screen drop down choice of response or action the programme gives an aural signal to indicate right or wrong choices and progresses through the home visit until the end. In-class evaluation indicated that this type of virtual pre-placement education had helped students in their actual home visiting practice. The virtual environments were intended to give the students the opportunity to engage in what Bogo *et al.* (2013) refers to as a two level holistic competence framework. Students not only were able to engage in critical reflection and analysis of both personal and professional aspects (meta-competence) but could assimilate procedural information and engage effectively with service users to undertake an assessment (procedural competence) (Bogo *et al.* 2013).

In using technologies for teaching and learning the immediate world of the virtual reflects the actual, with a bridge forming between virtual and practice. Students can embrace the creativity and immediacy of this learning tool. There are some considerations however in adopting this approach and the Holmes' (2015) study (which has used the on-line material of Google) has raised eight interesting questions that could be used as a virtual learning evaluation tool.

(1) 'Does the technology have the potential to support student learning? (2) Does the technology align with overall course objectives (for example: Is the application best suited for the course?) (3) Is the technology available and accessible to all students? (4) How does the time involved (for instructors and students alike) in learning the new technology compare to the expected benefits of its use? (5) Will the use of technology be supportive to student learning and instruction, or will its use detract from the overall purpose of the course? (6) Is the school environment supportive of teaching innovations (e.g., due to the fact that innovation in new teaching strategies and technology inclusion is time consuming, will the academic Faculty be rewarded/ recognised for such activities?) (8) Does the school environment have the resources to support the use of technology initially and its implementation over time?' (Holmes, *et al.* 2015, p. 224). Using technology to enhance learning

for placement practice is not a panacea. Any material created will only be as good as its author and be cognisant of application to practice. Robust evaluation is imperative.

Virtual training is not without its detractors (Young, 2000; Siebert & Spaulding—Givens, 2006) and in general virtual training has implications for disconnection and isolation (Smith, 2015). The essential elements within the delivery of information and training requires pragmatic discussion and evaluation. Traditionalists may like to imagine that the delivery of the basic principles of social work have not changed and this is indeed laudable. However, the way these principles are taught and experienced, in a technology rich and creative atmosphere in some countries, is exciting and offers a chameleonic opportunity for social work education. The future may hold and provide a general depository for web or virtual based health services resources where a deposit by few might encourage the creative development of many.

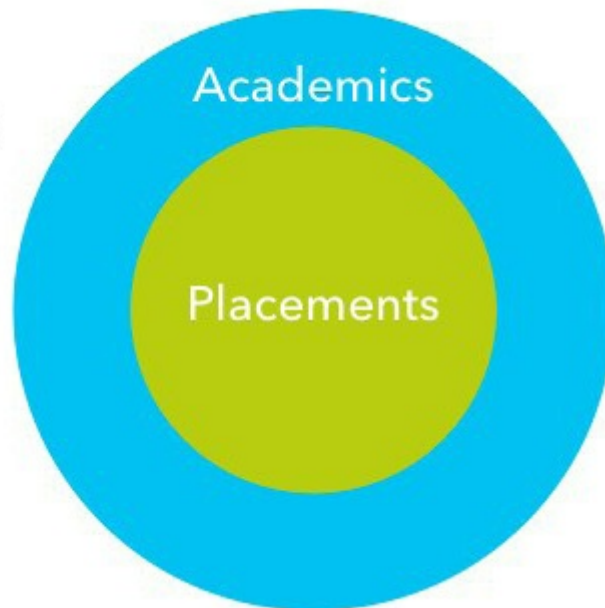
THE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSIBILITY

The basic tenant of any social work course is to train the student to deliver the best level of practice they can with the knowledge they have and the direction they take from their fieldwork practice. It means designing a course which will let its recipients respect difference, acknowledge difference and work with difference. It is normal to expect that some students will have prejudices. Good teaching will challenge prejudice, obliging the student to be cognisant of preconceived ideas and how these effect their practice. Raising awareness in students to be able to signal their own barriers and/or difficulties around certain topics is of primary importance before placement occurs. If situations arise during placement, triggers associated with levels of prejudice must be quickly attended to by the practice teacher and reviewed during supervision. Universities also have a responsibility to uphold best practice guidelines around delivering academic and practice content. Embracing the world of technology may not be for every course design but there is growing research evidence to support the investigation of some virtual training resources.

NEW APPROACHES: NEW THINKING

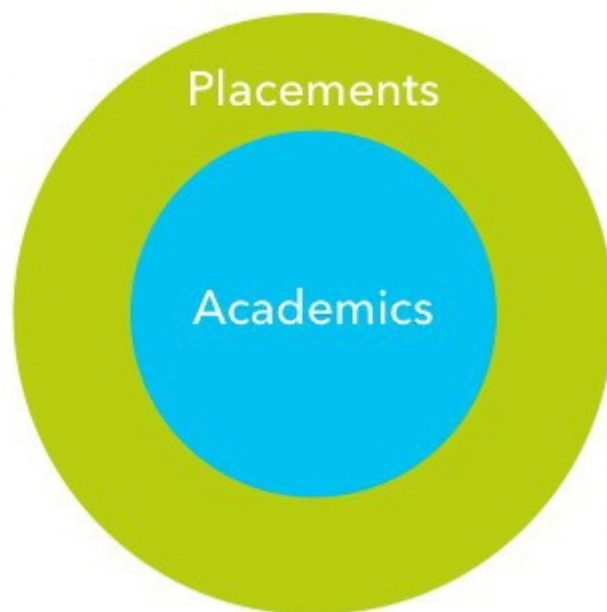
Placement (of which fieldwork home visiting is an integral part) accounts for 50% of most social work professional courses. Why does it seem so revolutionary then, to suggest that social work courses might begin to look at putting placements at the heart of the social work programme with the academics supporting?

Figure 6



This is as opposed to the stereotypical approach of putting the academics at the heart of the teaching and letting the placement fit in around?

Figure 7



The result would be to bring the professional practice part of the course into main focus. Would it mean Universities having to better invest in, recognise and support practice? Would it mean the sharing of professional educational identity on behalf of the University personnel?

Would there be any objection from practice teachers in repositioning their role and strengthening the partnership with educational establishments? Practice teachers already have a relationship with the colleges and universities in the usual course of the placement programme, it might be suggested that what some practice teachers would like to see is more recognition for their role in teaching the students. How many courses share their External Examiners report with practice teachers? How often would practice teachers receive from the social work course personnel, any feedback on their placement reports? In many remodelled designs of social work training courses the emphasis has tended to be on academic content design. The suggestion for new approaches and new thinking is to remodel all the content and relationships between stakeholders. Partnership building (inviting practice teachers onto interview panels), reciprocity arrangements (guest academic presentation in return for student placement), extension of goodwill gestures by the Universities/Colleges (library cards, reduced fees for any postgraduate courses, conferences passes) would refresh the idea of a more holistic training collective for all professional staff.

QUESTIONS

What are the things you remember observing from the last time you did a home visit?

Is there a responsibility on behalf of the agency to mirror practitioners' development towards cultural competence?

What might be needed?

How would a social work student know they were becoming culturally competent?





DO THE MATHS....

14 Weeks on S.W. Placement
3 home visits per week average
42 home visits per placement
84 home visits per MSW course
NO 2 VISITS THE SAME!



What is 'home'?

Home is the interface between the private and public.
It can be a refuge from danger and uncertainty.
It can be a place of danger and uncertainty.
Home is the depository for important human relationships.
It can provide routine, roles and rituals.
Bonds between family members can be broken or secured.
Personal identities can be constructed or deconstructed.
Safety can be secured or squandered.
Home is Power.

Who decides what is normal?

What helps you to decide what is normal?

A Homes that are normal or appear normal, what experience might you have? Homes defined by economics. What social justice opinion do you have on affordable and/or adequate housing?

B Homes that change in personnel or geographically. Homes where you just feel that something isn't right?

C Homes that smell.
Homes that are filthy.
Homes that are too tidy.

D Homes that you can't get into.
Homes with animals, two or four legged creatures!



FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS:

What are the basic needs, physical and emotional of this family? Can this home meet the needs of its inhabitants?

Regardless of the construct of this 'home' what are the connections between its inhabitants?

Iceberg Growth

Overview of case referral:
Read case records/discuss with supervisor/talk with any other interested parties/any specific agency policies? Any pertaining law section? Make contact with the individual or family.

Decide on the goals and purpose of the home visit.
How will it be structured?
What would be the most effective intervention?
What skills am I going to need here?
Are there cultural issues I need to consider?

Think about any safety issues.
Bring forward your awareness, perspective and check your attitude to this task.
Breathe.
Your formal placement supervision will give you a platform to discuss your interaction.

Student Iceberg Timeline : I'm drowning!

1

"I'm scared, I don't have any skills to go out on this referral".
"That's a really bad area, people get stabbed there. What if they stab me?!!" "This is a stupid referral, I'd be much better off on something more interesting".

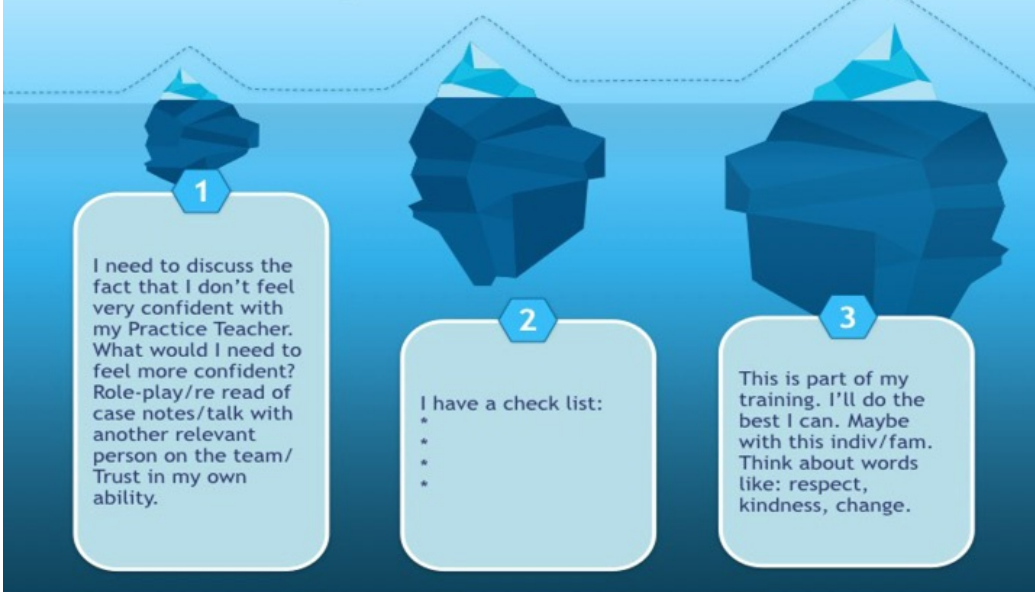
2

"Nobody will give me enough time to discuss this referral!"
"I'll just wing it and see what happens".

3

"This is going to be disastrous". "I'm fed up. Why did I want to do social work in the first place!"

Student Iceberg Timeline : I'm surviving!



1

I need to discuss the fact that I don't feel very confident with my Practice Teacher. What would I need to feel more confident? Role-play/re read of case notes/talk with another relevant person on the team/ Trust in my own ability.

2

I have a check list:

- *
- *
- *
- *

3

This is part of my training. I'll do the best I can. Maybe with this indiv/fam. Think about words like: respect, kindness, change.



**HOME VISITING:
WILL YOU SINK OR SWIM?**

Marguerita.mcGovern@nuigalway.ie

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Additional on-line resources

www.scie.org.uk Social Care Institute of Excellence

www.nopt.org National Organisation for Practice Teaching (England)

www.rip.org.uk E-Learning Modules

www.podsocs.com Social Work Podcasts from Griffith University,
Queensland, Australia

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