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**THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS - FIELDWORK  
SUPERVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE AND  
NEEDS FOR SUPPORT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of**

**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines current experiences, issues and concerns in fieldwork education in social work in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the perspectives of fieldwork supervisors. In particular the research explores how supervisors conceptualise their role and their needs for support, education and training to fulfil the role of student supervisor. In order to provide a background for an informed analysis and discussion of the research findings, the thesis provides a summary of key events and documents which have influenced developments in fieldwork education in Aotearoa/New Zealand from 1970 to 1997 and a review of other research studies from this country and overseas. Four areas of theorising are examined and applied to an understanding of fieldwork education in social work. These are critical social science, critical pedagogy, adult learning theories and models and a critical reflective conceptualisation of professional education. These theories are influential in the development of an argument for a critical reflective model of the practicum in social work education which connects the nature of the practice with which social workers are engaged to the professional education and training which prepares students for this practice.

The thesis is a qualitative study of the nature of teaching and learning in fieldwork education from the perspectives of fieldwork supervisors, and utilises an action research process. The research findings show that the current issues which are of concern to fieldwork supervisors reflect not only their personal journeys and experiences but are also influenced by what is happening at a political and ideological level in both the educational and practice settings in which fieldwork is situated. The recommendations which arise from the research with regard to future directions in policy, practice and research in fieldwork education, are at two levels. Firstly, there are practical suggestions about changes to the current set of arrangements around fieldwork education which could be implemented immediately by agencies and/or education and training institutions. Secondly, the research findings generate discussion about some of the deeper philosophical issues underlying the provision and resourcing of fieldwork education in social work which are unlikely to be resolved without the collaboration of all of the interested parties. In this respect, the fieldwork component of social work education is seen to be situated in a critical space, because placements are the point at which the worlds of educators, students, agency social workers and managers of social service organisations collide, thus creating the necessity for dialogue between all of the interest groups.

DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to my daughters Julie and Annette. May you have a lifelong love of learning.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*In the course of researching and writing up this study, I have entered into an exciting dialogue by e-mail with other educators both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas, who also have a passion for improving the quality of fieldwork education in social work. While too numerous to mention by name, these people have deepened my understanding of some of the current issues in fieldwork education in their countries.*

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