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The Potential of Field Education as Transformative Learning

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Abstract

Social work field education has reached a crisis point due to the imposition of neoliberal logics in both university and practice settings. As a result, social work programs are faced with challenges such as practicum shortages, barriers to field instructor recruitment and retention, and increased workload for those involved in field education (Ayala et al., 2017; Barnoff et al., 2017). Concerned by this reality, a team of critically oriented pedagogues and students from four Canadian universities hosted a workshop in May 2017 in order to foster collective dialogue with a diverse group of stakeholders about the ways in which the encroachment of neoliberalism may be confronted. This article presents key reflections that surfaced during the workshop related to the themes, such as identifying disjunctures between what is taught versus what is experienced and how intersecting identities and marginalization shape the field education process. Drawing from two case studies that were also presented during the workshop, we suggest strategies for inciting politicized and emancipatory social work field education, notably through fostering ongoing critical reflexivity, developing models for mentorship, and mapping out how field education is socially organized from the standpoint of the oppressed and marginalized.

Keywords: transformative learning, field education, social justice, practice

According to the accreditation standards developed by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE), field education is essential to "connect the theoretical/conceptual contributions of the academic setting with the practice setting, enabling the student to acquire practice skills" (2014, p. 13). However, recent scholarship suggests that the state of social work field education in Canada has reached a crisis point due to the continued encroachment of New Public Management (NPM), into both university and practice settings (Ayala et al., 2017; Brown, MacDonald, & Provencher, 2016; MacDonald & Nixon, 2016; McConnell, Sammon, & Pike, 2013; Preston & Aslett, 2014; Preston, George, & Silver, 2014). NPM is a core feature of how neoliberal governance impacts the social work profession, as it

> is based on the principle of unbound, free-market relations, while at the same time it calls for increasing regulation of labour within the public sphere. The neoliberal trend is not a withdrawal of government involvement from state institutions, such as the university, but is rather a series of new forms of governance aligned with market-driven rationales to measure and assess workers' activity. (Barnoff, Moffat, Todd, & Panitch, 2017, p. 8)

NPM thus transfers managerial logics from the private to the public sector, emphasizing efficiency, effectiveness, and excellence (Shepherd, 2018). According to Ward (2011), these reforms generate an audit of performance culture and work intensification resulting from an increase in the compliance requirements of data-driven management based on evaluation systems that impose narrow scripts of "what works," producing new forms of governance, regulation, and self-regulation. As social workers in community and institutional settings struggle with budget cuts, restructured workplaces, increasing workloads, and pressure on producing results-based outputs through a standardization of technical practice (Baines, 2011; Bellot, Bresson, & Jetté, 2013; Grenier & Bourque, 2016), the number of students entering social work programs continue to rise (Ayala et al., 2017). This neoliberal shift within social work education and practice settings has disproportionate impacts on those who are historically marginalized, such as racialized people (Badwall, 2014; Yee & Wagner, 2013).

The neoliberal shift that is encapsulated in NPM logics has had devastating impacts on social work practice and field education, including: growing class sizes, practicum shortages, competition for practicum placements, barriers to field instructor recruitment and retention, increased workload for field education coordinators and directors, demand for competency and clinical based skills (i.e., cloaked in a "professionalism" discourse), and a de-emphasizing on political and transformative learning (Ayala et al., 2017; Barnoff et al., 2107). NPM logics espouse practice standardization and uniformity, producing a risk lens that reduces complex social phenomena to singular units of risk and need. NPM thus requires that professionals (teachers, social workers) adhere to performance measures and target outputs (Ward, 2011) based on the compartmentalization of human struggles and social conditions (Baines, 2011, 2017). It reinforces the external and expert human gaze on human struggles, intensifying individual responsibilization and Otherness

while absolving inadequate social systems and structures. It also reinforces expert frameworks and calculative rationalities that run counter to anti-oppressive and empowerment perspectives embracing empathy, dialogical meanings, and learner stances; rendering and reinforcing practice as cautious, conservative, and controlling.

The significant workload and practice restructuring that has become synonymous with NPM has added pressure on field educators, such as supervisors, while simultaneously soliciting them (sometimes by force) to take on the supervision of students. The lack of recognition (i.e., time and resources, institutional recognition, etc.) of social workers' supervisory efforts is a common complaint, and the extra workload of supervision (often unacknowledged and un- or under-appreciated) is often a disincentive to take on this important work upon which all social work programs depend. This absorption of demands despite restrained abilities to act (due to encroachment of standardization) also reduces the capacity to understand social phenomena and practice issues in their complexity. Hence, the transmission of complex knowledge systems (intertwining academic, practice wisdom and experiential spheres) to students (future practitioners) is thwarted. As Freire (1993) warned,

> one of the characteristics of oppressive cultural action which is almost never perceived by the dedicated but naïve professionals who are involved is the emphasis on a *focalized* view of problems rather than on seeing them as dimensions of a *totality*. (p. 141)

The Potential of Transformative Learning to Confront NPM

Despite the increasing demands of neoliberalism on social work education and practice, various actors within the social work profession have resisted and continue to resist through different forms of activism, including fostering liberatory education. Liberatory education, also known as popular education, "is a philosophy and learning process to foster a transformation from inevitability to the conscious imagining of and striving for an alternative future" (Freire, 1970, cited in Lorenzetti, 2016, p. 101). Rather than assuming the inevitability of the current neoliberal model of social work, liberatory education can provide pathways to address the societal roots of oppression and to create radical alternatives (Agger, 2006). Crucial to liberatory education is the application of the principles of transformative learning, which pushes both students and educators to question dominant norms, values, and belief systems by fostering an educational space that "opens up, as rupture, emancipates the learner from the domination of what has been taken-as-given" (Sargis, 2008, p. 1).

Indeed, there is a growing body of literature that focuses on the ways in which transformative learning processes manifest within social work field education (Cheek, Rector, & Davis, 2007; Gelman, 2012; Lorenzetti et al., 2019; Maschi, MacMillan, Pardasani, Lee, & Moreno, 2013; Williams & Reeves, 2004). These studies include exploring the use of a capacity building model informed by a critical pedagogical framework with students in China (Ku, Yuan-Tsang, & Liu, 2009) and the usefulness of experiential learning activities for students to develop critical consciousness about domestic violence and sexual assault prevention (Cheek et al., 2007). According to Jones (2009), critical pedagogy through transformative learning

"can act both as a lens through which the experience of social work students may be understood and as a framework for practice, suggesting ways in which teaching and learning activities can be developed with an explicit, transformative intent" (p. 9). However, most research on transformative learning in social work is restricted to the classroom (Gibbons & Gray, 2002) and thus lacks the "real life" connections with practice settings (Gelman, 2012). Few programs include and evaluate the impacts of transformative learning on non-student stakeholders such as field supervisors (Downey & Miles, 2005; Lorenzetti et al., 2019).

This article expands upon an emerging dialogue taking place in social work faculties across Canada on the practice, commitment to, possibilities, and challenges of engaging in liberatory and critical pedagogies within social work field education, and the potential of countering NPM logics (Todd et al., 2017). Specifically, this article draws from a 2017 CASWE conference workshop titled, *Reflections on the Experiences of Field Education: Between Romanticization, Acceptance, and Resistance,* hosted at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario. This workshop included a diverse group of more than 40 field education coordinators, field instructors, students, and professors. With a focus on the field practicum as a site to foster transformative learning and social justice praxis, this workshop aimed to engage both educators and students in discussions about tensions related to the "implicit and explicit roles of dominance and oppression within the profession" (Lorenzetti, 2013, p. 51). Specifically, we report on the discussion points and learnings generated by the workshop, and how we could take up, reflect upon, and apply them to our pedagogies and respective social work programs. We close with a discussion of strategies for action to reinvigorate thinking about field education and its potential for transformational learning.

Although most of the workshop was dedicated to small-group discussions based on key themes and questions (to be presented in subsequent section), two case studies that were teaching and research strategies fostering transformative learning were also presented: (a) the "Journey Guides" model aimed to prepare graduate social work students to enter field placements (Lorenzetti, Dhungel, Lorenzetti, Oshchepkova, & Haile, 2017) and (b) key findings from a Master's research project that mapped out the ways in which social work field education is socially organized from the vantage point of racialized students (Srikanthan, 2019). Although these case studies were presented at the beginning of the workshop, they are presented in the discussion section of this article focused on strategies for action, as they serve, along with the reflections that surfaced during the workshop, as concrete strategies that can be mobilized to foster transformative learning within social work field education. In addition to strategies for action, we also critically reflect upon the importance of recognizing and embracing the political nature of social work education and practice as a way to counter neoliberal logics.

Situating Ourselves in the Process of Thinking Critically About Field Education

Before turning to the workshop, we recognize the importance of situating ourselves in this reflection about field education, as social work students and educators. Indeed, the position that we put forward in this article is shaped by the

multiplicity of our social locations and roles within social work field education across multiple francophone and anglophone universities. We have all been involved in various activist movements, community, anti-racist, anti-poverty, and anti-Madness work. Some of us are racialized, first- or second-generation settlers, while others are fifth-generation settlers and have worked and lived in economically poor countries, been involved in international social work, and frequently work in second or third languages. We all have first-hand experience of Otherness; how oppression and privilege shape experience. For some of us, these experiences of unequal power dynamics are intimate, ongoing, and bring into sharper focus issues of race, gender, discrimination, and marginalization. All of these experiences shape our understandings of social justice and transformation and the ability of field education to transform social and political structures. We recognize that we have all experienced moments in which we have had to navigate the political nature of social work as students, practitioners, community organizers, and educators. In varying degrees and in varying ways, each of us has managed power dynamics as people in positions of privilege and/or marginalization or both simultaneously. The recognition of power and politics allows each of us to situate ourselves and critically reflect upon how we move toward anti-oppressive practice and social justice. Our various social locations and positions within social work programs shaped the creation of the workshop and the collective analysis and knowledge building process that we present in this article.

The Workshop

The workshop was developed in three parts drawing on team members' significant expertise in field education, either as pedagogues or as students across different sites, namely, Montreal, Calgary, and Toronto. The first part (Part A) consisted of a panel format providing short presentations by team members, including: a short history of field education in Canada; an exploration of the current challenges facing field education from a national study; confrontations and tensions in field from a pedagogical but also a student perspective; intersectional consequences for racialized and marginalized students; and finally, engaging in reflexivity and critical reflection to stimulate transformation. Specifically, two case studies (that figure at the end of this article) were mobilized at the beginning of our workshop to generate discussion and offer tangible examples of opportunities for critical reflection as well as the pressures and complexities of field education for racialized students. Part B involved small group discussions inspired by an Open Forum framework, asking members to identify strategies to put in place to promote change around three themes: (a) intersecting identities and marginalization; (b) tensions between what we teach and what students experience; (c) engaging in critical reflection and reflexivity. Part C was a brief discussion in the large group format, reporting back on what was discussed in small group and is summarized below.

The workshop aimed to provide a collective space to allow participants to share their perspectives, based on their own experiences and social locations, about the challenges and possibilities of fostering transformative learning within social work field education. The workshop was designed to both present the historical and

political context for transformative learning within social work field education as well as foster critical dialogue within small groups. The guiding questions that we posed during the workshop included:

1. Is social work field education transformative and politicizing?
2. Is it, or should it be, an arena of transformative and emancipatory learning?
3. What are the functions of field placements? In what ways can field education be transformative and politicizing?
4. What is the role of the academy in preparing students for transformative and politicized practice?

These questions sought to create a generative dialogue on the current and future challenges facing social work field education in a NPM climate. Through a collective synthesis of the themes and tensions that emerged from this workshop as well as subsequent discussions among the authors of this article, we present the core themes that emerged. After the panel presentations, participants were invited to work in small groups. The approximately 40 participants, made up of students, field coordinators, professors, and field supervisors were organized into small groups of six to eight participants (Part B). A period of 45 minutes allowed participants to share their reflections in response to the questions above and also to name strategies for action. They were asked to offer strategies in relation to two subjects: (a) tensions in the field: confronting oppression and engaging with transformation; (b) engaging in critical reflection and reflexivity. Each group had flip chart paper to summarize their main discussion points for reporting back. The small groups were then brought together to report to the larger group what they discussed, what they discovered, and how they could act upon their findings. Broad summaries of such discussions and not verbatim accounts are offered here because the workshop was conceived to generate discussion about field education. Thus, an ethics approval process did not figure in our process.

On the subject of tensions in the field and confronting oppression, participants noted these comments and suggestions:

- Recognize community placement perspectives as drivers of social transformation and important learning for students;
- Include the subject of social justice and activism in all classes;
- Identify actual strategies and resources for students to use to confront oppression;
- Offer a course that presents micro and macro perspectives before entering the field;
- Increase discussions about social justice perspectives into field instruction training and orientation;
- Transgress boundaries between universities and the field to offer spaces for conversations on “resistance” in the field;

- Have field instructors speak up about social justice and have "disrupters" talk about their perspectives that confront oppression and NGP pressures;
- Be able to hear descendant voices and make them loud;
- Be inspired by small communities because it is all about relationships;
- Reach out (social work departments, schools) to field sites because supervisors can't come easily to universities;
- Promote diversity in faculties;
- Offer field seminars as safe spaces where things can be named, use them accordingly;
- Promote alliances with social movements and unions;
- Analyze power relations in field placements with students during seminars;
- Bring in community members before the field practicum to speak about the actual work and role of the social worker.

On engaging in critical reflection and reflexivity, participants made these suggestions:

- Have "readiness" assignments as indicators for critical reflection;
- Perform reflective and self-assessments before the field practicum and integrate them in field preparation manuals;
- Have portfolios in which one assignment on critical reflexivity is important; have it be an ongoing document that is presented in final exams; tweak it so students can connect to class;
- Have aspiration assignments; have it match to the Journey Guides (as they were presented in the panel);
- At the end of each month, get students to critically reflect upon an important and "thorny" theme in social work, e.g., activities could include concepts like power;
- Promote multiple sections so there are fewer students in each class;
- Have a moment at the end of field placement (e.g., lunch and learn activities) to get feedback from students; have them include the reflection in their portfolio;
- Demonstrate consistency, transparency, and authenticity in field liaison to create relationships.

In the following section, we elaborate upon some of these key take-aways from the workshop, as well as integrate and deepen them with team members' insights and experiences of field education.

Being Disrupters in Social Justice Work and Challenging Oppression

One of the suggestions brought forward by participants of the workshop was to have field instructors speak up about social justice and have disrupters talk about their viewpoint, to purposefully promote descendant voices and make them loud, much as hooks (1994) and Freire (1993) have urged: to transgress, to disrupt—to make education the practice of freedom. Part of doing this may include applying the principle of transparency, such as naming our complicity as social work practitioners in oppressive processes. Exposing ourselves and asking what benefits we gain from being privileged and who is harmed in the process? What systems of oppression are we unwittingly maintaining, reinforcing, and reproducing, specifically in field education?

In addition, field seminars can be constructed as safer spaces where issues can be brought up and named, in particular issues related to power. This fosters space for students to critically reflect upon power issues and understand how to navigate, negotiate, collectivize, and strategize to dismantle and deconstruct them, all the while working to reconstruct and re-envision equitable living and being. This should be a central theme in field placement seminars. Community leaders and organizers can be brought into the seminar to highlight their experiences and speak to the various contentious roles they play and how they navigate and rally against systemic inequalities and discrimination.

It is important to also identify actual strategies and resources for students to use in their efforts to confront oppression and expose privilege in practicum and in the classroom. Rather than teach as if these are abstractions, students should experiment with practical applications of strategies: to put these skills into use, to apply them so that they are meaningful. Participants also outlined the importance of students learning to think in a holistic manner, for breadth and depth, the hallmark of social work education—person, groups, communities in their socio-economic and political contexts (person-in-situation [Thompson & Stepney, 2018]).

On the Importance of Critical Reflection

While we agree on the aims of critical reflection, it is very difficult to put into practice as well as have its importance in practice milieus valued more generally, particularly in neoliberal times. Critical reflection is subjective, necessarily so, but its politically situated, historically constituted character makes its subsequent instruction, practice, implementation, experimentation, and attainment, as well as its evaluation, difficult to grasp. In times of neoliberal crunch, the importance of making time and space for critical reflection (that evades quantification or linear analyses) in our practice renders it difficult to justify in budget lines. Our workshop participants cited critical reflection as a fundamental concept of social work praxis, as a distinguishing feature of social work practice, in contrast to other helping professions. It was also described as a necessary practice to preserve and promote, even within hostile contexts that devalue qualitative work. The workshop thus generated many questions regarding the importance and the how-to of critical reflection. So how do we instill it and make it valued in times of budget

compressions and layoffs? How do we take into account our social location and positionality, issues of race, gender, class? To what effect? How do we resist neoliberal forces and make critical reflection, so central to social work praxis, important and valued by non-practitioners and decision makers and connect it to larger structural issues of inequality?

Another strategy shared among participants was the use of readiness assignments as indicators of critical reflection, for instance, having students engage in self-assessments and exercises encouraging critical reflection before the field practicum and integrating them into field preparation manuals. One strategy was to have students build and develop portfolios, and within them to have at least one assignment on critical reflection connected to activities in class-based learning. These activities should be ongoing, and the exercises could be connected to ongoing classwork, final exams, etc. There was also the suggestion that there be aspiration assignments.

In terms of the shape this emphasis on critical reflection could take, students could be asked to critically reflect on one thorny aspect of practice, for instance the concept of power, followed by the problematization of other complex notions affecting practice such as authority, alliance, privilege, etc. An activity could consist of asking students, field and sessional instructors, and professors involved in field education to reflect upon their own social locations and positionality, to consider how these aspects may shape the engagement and accompaniment processes. Finn (2016) reminded us that power relations are always at play and are more significant in contexts in which relationships are formed for the purpose of creating personal, social, or political change. This could even include lunch-and-learn activities at the end of field placement to get feedback from students, and these reflections could be included in their portfolios. Obviously, constructing smaller sections of students for these kinds of activities promotes social cohesion, helps build relationships and relationship-based work, and encourages processes of reflection and intimate self-and-other-knowledge.

Much as Ayala et al. (2017) found in their study, participants reported that a majority of students tend to gravitate toward institutional placements, believing that this experience may give them an advantage in hiring and a secure job once their degree is completed. However, the value of learning in community environments must not be forgotten, particularly ones with an active social justice lens; these experiences and learnings are not lost, but rather transferable to any context. Moreover, learning in smaller communities emphasizes the importance of learning about and valuing relationships. Universities need to do a better job of reaching out to placement settings, having a more active presence in the community to nurture these valuable and essential relationships to social work education.

It is also crucial to better understand the experiences of marginalized students, especially those who are multiply oppressed, in order to confront oppression in their schools and placement milieus because they are subsequently more affected by NPM pressures. For example, Srikanthan's case study of the social organization of field placements (case study below) exposes the unequal experiences of racialized

students and elucidates the invisible forms of oppression experienced by these students in social work programs. Forming committees to support and learn from student's experiences as a forum of support but also of learning and promoting their leadership could lead to developing better policies as well as advocating for additional resources to support their education, integration, and transitions. Faculty membership also needs to diversify to be more representative of the student population and the people they serve. We believe it is important to encourage discursive spaces to expose these issues: to transgress boundaries between universities and the field, to offer spaces for conversations on resistance to managerialism and to conformity, and also to attend to thorny issues such as racism and sexism that may lead to precarious, inequitable, and unsuccessful experiences of field education.

Discussion

Strategies for Action

The discussion that occurred during the workshop required people to be open and thoughtful about the concrete challenges they faced in navigating their social location and/or social work position in order to foster or engage in transformative learning. These difficult but productive conversations were a powerful example of the usefulness of critical reflexivity. In this section, we therefore explore the ways in which ongoing critical reflexivity can be mobilized to foster transformative learning. In particular, two case studies are shared as concrete examples of how research and teaching strategies can be mobilized to foster transformative learning. One case study focuses on an emergent model for transformative learning, the Journey Guides, while the second case study examines how the process of field placement selection is socially organized for racialized students. Both of these case studies, as well as the discussions that arose during the workshop, highlight the politicized nature of social work education and practice.

Engaging in Ongoing Critical Reflexivity

Schön (1983) was a pioneer in developing the concept of the reflective practitioner as someone who develops an understanding of the field they are working in and reflects on it accordingly. This reflection can be at the moment of practice (reflection-in-action) or in retrospect, to review what happened (reflection-on-action). Thompson & Stepney (2018) argued that Schön's approach has been criticized for not going far enough in addressing wider social issues of inequality; that his approach ignores power dynamics. We prefer to take up Fook's (2002) definition of critical reflection that "places emphasis and importance on an understanding of how a reflective stance uncovers power relations and how structures of domination are created and maintained" (p. 41). Similarly, Finn (2016) argued that critical reflection includes questioning implicit beliefs that relate to different aspects of our experiences. It is the process of asking why. It is "a structured, analytic, and emotional process that helps us examine the ways in which we make meaning of circumstances, events, and situations," that "pushes us to interpret experience, question our taken-for-granted assumptions of how things ought

to work, and reframe our inquiry to open up new possibilities for thought and action. Posing critical questions is key…" (Finn & Jacobson, 2003, p. 355) to cultivating continuous self-assessment and fostering connections and linkages between personal and social concerns (Finn, 2016). This opening up engages in a process of "problematizing the ordinary" (Freire, 1993) and is particularly relevant when NPM logics become integrated into practice, become normative, taken-for-granted ways of doing and thinking.

Case Studies

The next two case studies that were presented in Part A of our workshop demonstrate more concretely some of the potential strategies we could deploy as field educators as well as some of the unintended consequences of NPM on field education.

Case study: Fostering critical reflectivity through Journey Guides. Critical reflection is the process of learning from and making meaning of experience and unearthing fundamental (and dominant) assumptions about power (Fook, 2007). Critical reflection, according to Fook (2012, slide 9), is a process of unearthing deeper assumptions about and within self, and others; it is a "process of uncovering and unsettling (fundamental) hidden or implicit assumptions (ie. [*sic*] the "taken for granted") … (especially as they relate to how power is created or maintained)."

Thus, through the practice of critical reflection one reduces the gap between theory and practice by examining and challenging very deeply held assumptions and reflecting on power to promote change. Fook (2007) argued there needs to be a critical process that is structured, practical, meaningful, and speaks to workplace demands.

While critical reflection is an important social work skill, we have identified challenges in how students learn about critical reflexivity. One challenge is the lack of opportunities for students to apply critical reflection within their field practicums. In response, a critical pedagogical process was developed and implemented by a group of educators and community practitioners at the University of Calgary. This process is encapsulated by the development of Journey Guides, a community-based experiential learning framework that "focuses on preparing graduate students to enter field placements in both local and international settings" (Lorenzetti et al., 2017, p. 802). It includes an "eight-step experiential framework" (p. 802) that supports transformative learning. Journey Guides are defined as "social workers with community organizing experience and cultural knowledge related to a student's potential or selected practice region or population" (Lorenzetti et al., 2017, p. 803). Journey Guides provide one-to-one mentorship, networking opportunities, and community-based engagement experiences, as well as other forms of relational support for students. They also participate in class-based teaching and forums within the faculty to promote a circular and team-based learning experience. This learning process is currently being evaluated for its effectiveness as a transformative pedagogical tool.

The contemporary political and social context, as described previously, puts into question how and whether field education inspires students in critical reflection (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011) and critical action (DePoy, Hartman, & Haslett, 1999). Moreover, the present conditions of field education in Canada result in intersectional

consequences for various actors (i.e., students, faculty, field education coordinators, etc.), with attention to those who face marginalization, including those who are Indigenous, racialized, queer/trans, poor/working class, people with disabilities, etc. These complexities were brought into sharper focus with another case study that was presented as a discussion generation tool to open up the workshop.

Case study: The social organization of field education coordination and the standpoint of racialized social work students. During the workshop, Srikanthan presented findings from an institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005) on social work field education coordination. Taking the standpoint of racialized students, through textual analyses, participant observation, and interviews with five racialized students from one school of social work in southern Ontario, she explored how social relations are organized into field education coordination. One crucial finding from her study was that the labour market, itself stratified by race, gender, and class, is buried within the coordination of field education (Srikanthan, 2019). She points out how neoliberalism is transforming the delivery of field education to a process that resembles getting a job (e.g., attending interview and résumé workshops organized by the field education department; writing out cover letters and résumés; networking and making cold calls to placement sites to investigate field education prospects; participating in interviews and organizing work references). Furthermore, while the process is described as "fair," in which a given "field placement/setting accepts students without discrimination" (CASWE, 2014, p. 15), students from marginalized backgrounds, including racialized students, described navigating puzzling subtexts in which they were prioritized and matched to undesirable practice settings that appeared to be marked by race. The matching of racialized students to devalued settings went unaddressed.

The overall process of securing what was supposed to be a "purely educational experience" (Morley & Dunstan, 2013, p. 15), was surrounded by competition, not unlike students' previous experiences in the labour market. Herein lies the disjuncture between the experiential perspectives of racialized students and the abstract perspective of the institution: While the institution aspires to place students through a fair process, the experiential realities of racialized students suggest that this process is one of struggle in which race is always present, yet also invisible. From the perspective of racialized social work students, obtaining a placement is understood with what Smith (1987) called a "bifurcated consciousness" (p. 6), in which there is a split between the world as experienced by subordinated groups and the dominant institutional perspective to which such groups must adapt. Not all placements were the same; rather, like jobs, students categorized and ranked placements along the lines of race, gender, and class. Many of the students spoke about desired placements at institutional settings, such as hospitals, school boards, and child welfare agencies, while those at racialized settings, including ethno-specific services, religious charities, and community-based organizations, were devalued. These jobs are also often held by racialized workers. Placements at institutional settings were at the top of the hierarchy. These settings were associated with higher pay, prestige, security, and whiteness. As revealed by students' accounts, a raced, gendered, and classed hierarchy exists within the labour market and is buried

within the texts and processes of field education coordination. The accounting practices in field education coordination, in which placement sites, schools, and students are sorted and matched, is an area that should be further studied to make visible how social inequalities are produced and reproduced through the delivery of field education and how they disadvantage racialized students and others from marginalized backgrounds. This study demonstrates that far from being apolitical settings and processes, field education is inherently political and thus has the potential to be transformational, either reinforcing existing inequalities or potentially disrupting them.

Recognizing and Embracing the Political Nature of Social Work Within Field Education

Based on our previous experiences as, and with, students and field educators, we are keenly aware that experiences of field education are situated along a broad spectrum. Field education is often romanticized by students as the moment when "true learning" takes place; when theory is put into action. However, we have often witnessed students' disillusionment with practice milieus once actually in the field. These experiences tend to span two poles: One pole edges students to "fit" into more normative structures of field education, leaving little room for critical self-reflection (generally characterized by placements in big institutions with managerialism and conformity tendencies), while the other pole tends to ignite resistance to these forces and invigorate an alignment with social work's goals of social justice, liberation from oppression, systemic change, and transformative learning.

With the intention of reinvigorating social justice agendas in field education and disrupting the creeping "student as consumers" within "academic capitalism" contexts, we take up Todd et al.'s (2017) call that social work educators need to:

> be aware of the relations of power that are tied the language of consumerism and the successful rendering apart and divisive nature this concept introduces for both students and professors. This type of divisive politic between professors and students serves the purposes of academic capitalism, not progressive social work. Focusing on discussions of the purpose and politics of social work in a neoliberal context is an opportunity to recapture the notion that learning environments are about creating change and transformation (for students and faculty) rather than offering a product one can supply or purchase without being transformed in the process. (pp. 553–554)

Therefore, we suggest that social justice perspectives need to be better promoted and integrated into field instruction training and orientation. No matter how well-intentioned field instructors may be, social justice concerns, more generally, are often not put forward as central concerns but rather are often left in the shadows in placement settings. Further, the political and transformational possibilities and dimensions of field education often remain untapped or invisible.

Indeed, NPM has significantly impacted field educators and their ability to carry out their work. Ayala et al.'s (2017) study noted that there has been a rise of identified student needs requiring support from field coordinators and supervisors.

> Participants reported that their workloads continue to increase as social work education programs grow in size and student bodies become more diverse. Students themselves are often balancing special learning needs and multiple life roles resulting in numerous requests for accommodations, which are time and effort intensive for field education coordinators to address. In turn, field instructors and practicum agencies also require extra supports and resources in meeting the needs and requirements of students with complex learning needs or life circumstances. (p. 8)

Within this context, field instructors, who provide students with supervised access to experiential learning and direct social work practice, are key actors in transformative pedagogy. Field instructors should be reached out to, as allies and principal actors, in this endeavour for transformative learning. Further, the richness, multitude, and diversity of actors in field education, including field education coordinators, supervisors, and mentors, add knowledge, know-how, and spirit to this resistance. We argue that field actors need to figure prominently in resisting these discourses and practices alongside students, faculty liaisons, and professors, as well as alumni and community leaders; and we need to recognize the important roles they play in field education, which is often considered the signature pedagogy of students' social work education (Bogo, 2015).

If we are to reinvigorate field education as a site of transformational learning, we must not neglect the importance of actors who carry out this work. Given this imperative, the field setting can be understood not only as a site of job readiness and "fitting" into agency agendas, but more importantly, as a site for social justice praxis. Applying what hooks (1994) suggested as "engaged pedagogy" requires that field education delve into a critical appraisal of unequal power relationships in order to

> open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions. I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (p. 12)

We agree with Todd et al. (2017) that social work education is not merely about obtaining a degree, but about creating change and transformation (for students and faculty—*and, we would include, for field coordinators, supervisors, and placement settings*), and requires us to push back against "the cycle of distancing between students and faculty that has evolved with the move toward academic capitalism" (p. 554). Social work as a praxis of justice-seeking through its exposure of social and systemic inequalities and the desire to redress them is especially important considering the established "white goodness lens and scripts" that tend to dominate the social work profession (Badwall, 2014; Briskman, 2008, in Finn, 2016, p. 195). The white dominance of the social work profession means "social workers who experience the world through the lens of white privilege may remain unwittingly complicit in practices of oppression in their work as they follow the path of least resistance" (Finn, 2016, p. 195). Underlying assumptions as well as practices, discourses that shape knowledge and practice remain unquestioned as well as their own privilege in reinforcing oppression (Badwall, 2014; Mullaly & West, 2018).

Conclusion

Social work practice has been gravely shaken by austerity measures that attempt to rationalize, standardize, and limit social work goals of social justice and social change through various forms of regulation (Barnoff et al., 2017) and a subsequent devaluing of its relational and critical dimensions. Taking up Ayala et al.'s (2017) and McConnell et al.'s (2013) work, citing the crisis facing field education—such as the difficulties of recruitment and retention of field instructors, rising workloads of field education coordinators, and the rising numbers of student enrolments despite the lack placement opportunities (oversaturation)—it is difficult to imagine putting the suggestions we put forward in this article into place. However, while we recognize the many challenges facing social work, we also believe that many of the suggestions that emerged from our workshop are most likely taking place to some degree in social work programs across Canada, and shape what we consider to be "sites of resistance" to neoliberal logics. Therefore we suggest that these initiatives in field education be shared and developed in order to confront the dominance of NPM strategies and to reinvigorate and reinforce field education as a site of transformative learning. Indeed, perhaps it is through field education and its resistance to NPM pressures that social work will reclaim and put forward its emancipatory ethos.

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