Editorial
Practice teaching and learning across Ireland

Although there are distinctly different systems of health and social care provision in Ireland and Northern Ireland, there is also much in common and a strong tradition of inter-agency and inter-professional collaboration across jurisdictions. It has been an immense pleasure to guest edit a special issue of the journal representing current issues in practice teaching and learning across Ireland. We celebrate this collection of 20 papers based on research, evaluations, reflections, and innovations from the disciplines of social work, nursing, speech and language therapy, social care, community work, youth work and medicine. Due to the number of submissions, this collection will be published across two issues of this journal.

In May 2023 the World Health Organization declared that COVID-19 was no longer a public health emergency of international concern. This special issue provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the impact of the preceding three-year period of seismic challenge and change. Many of the innovations, prompted by implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to be relevant to the practice teaching and learning community and some may inform practice beyond Ireland.

For the purposes of this editorial, we have grouped articles according to the following themes:

- technology in practice teaching and learning;
- experiences of students and practice teachers/educators (the terminology varies according to discipline);
- approaches in supervision; critical and systemic theoretical frameworks; and
- innovative models of practice teaching.

Some articles address topics or issues that cut across these themes.

Technology in practice teaching and learning

The use of technology in practice teaching and learning was foregrounded during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the authors in the following articles also consider how technology may support practice teaching and learning into the future.

Mackle et al. (in this issue) invited one cohort of undergraduate social work students to complete a survey, evaluating their experiences of online teaching during their 'preparation for practice learning' module in semester one. They were asked to rate how well this prepared them for completing their first placement in semester two, during strict COVID-19 measures, including social distancing. Findings, which are based on 30 respondents, indicated that pivoting to online teaching did not hamper the expected development of core social work skills. Furthermore, virtual teaching methods increased the digital literacy of both educators and students, which was beneficial for communicating virtually with service users during placement. The authors acknowledge that COVID-19 has changed the context for online communications globally, with virtual communication offering service users and social workers greater flexibility in terms of how and when they communicate. Furthermore, as social workers and other disciplines continue to use hybrid modes of service delivery, it is essential that social work education equips students to employ a range of virtual and in-person approaches to practice.

The increasing reliance of health and social care on technology since the COVID-19 pandemic was also highlighted by Lynch and colleagues (future issue), who developed a Technology-Enabled Practice Education (TEPE) Toolkit using a six-step, co-designed approach. The work involved 12 undergraduate Speech and Language Therapy students, with experience of practice education completed through tele practice or simulation-based learning. Participants also included 10 practice educators (Speech and Language Therapists), who provided clinical placements for students during the COVID-19 pandemic and had experience of face-to-face and technology-supported supervision methods. These authors concluded that a hybrid model, which offers students the opportunity to engage in clinical learning in person and through technology is the optimal choice to provide them with the skills, they require for modern healthcare delivery.

Murphy et al. (future issue) invited six endoscopy trainees, at different stages of their medical training, to complete a pictorial questionnaire to assess baseline recognition of upper gastrointestinal pathology and to complete five virtual video endoscopy simulation sessions. On completion, they participated in a semi-structured interview to explore their experience of the teaching sessions and to determine if virtual video endoscopy simulation training, aids endoscopy trainee learning of pathology in the era of COVID-19. Findings indicated that trainees who commenced their endoscopy training during the pandemic, believed it was unaffected by the COVID-19 restrictions, which was in stark contrast to the senior trainees who stated the pandemic had a severe, detrimental effect on their training.

Student and practice teacher/practice educator experiences

The importance of hearing directly from students and practice teachers/ practice educators is evident in the articles discussed below. Combined, these articles although emerging from the disciplines of social work, community and youth work, provide insights that can inform practice teachers across disciplines, who strive to improve practice learning experiences for all stakeholders.

Empirical research by Hayes et al. (this issue) explored the differences between male and female students who failed a social work practice placement over a five-year period in four participating universities across Northern Ireland and Ireland. Findings are based on anonymous quantitative data extracted from 53 practice teaching / assessment reports, and follow-up qualitative interviews with 11 consenting students who failed a placement. The findings indicated that male students were more likely to fail placement for poor professional conduct or the inability to follow instructions and were more likely to be asked to permanently withdraw from the course. Whereas more female students failed for poor written communication skills or were more likely to be registered with disability services for dyslexia. Equal numbers of students disclosed mental health issues, which negatively impacted on progression. Given the rise in the number of university

students disclosing mental health issues and the high levels of stress in social work practice, this study provides useful insights for all practice teachers, academics, and placement providers.

Bradley et al. (future issue) explore the emerging professional identity of 75 students completing undergraduate degrees in community and youth work. Interestingly, final year students collaborated as researchers, undertaking, and analysing a narrative style interview with a class peer to explore their learning and professional identity development across the programme. The authors undertook further analysis across the dataset. Research participants articulated a vision for value-led practice grounded in human rights and collective action. The findings further revealed that critical consciousness built through classroom based experiential learning and fieldwork practice is central to professional identity development for community and youth work students.

Owens (future issue) invited students and practice teachers to provide feedback on placements that were disrupted at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Completed questionnaires were returned by 99/161 students and by 85/159 practice teachers. Findings indicated high levels of satisfaction among students in relation to how practice teachers provided opportunities to increase skills and confidence in social work practice, despite the pandemic. Practice teachers reported development of new skills in mentoring, supervision and case management enabling students to link theory to practice in a concrete and coherent way. The primary challenges for practice teachers were time management: balancing their workload and student supervision and working remotely during COVID-19 restrictions. For both students and practice teachers limited opportunities to engage in face to face, relationship-based practice with families in this context was particularly difficult. The study underlines the importance of placements for students' professional development and the significant role that practice teachers and the wider team play in ensuring a positive placement experience for students. The centrality of the relationship building process between practice teachers and their students and students and service users is emphasised.

Mackle and O'Brien (this issue) conducted a menti-meter poll with practice teachers across statutory and voluntary sector organisations in Northern Ireland, to ascertain how they had supported social work students to meet their community development requirement on placement. Findings are based on responses from 106/321 practice teachers, which generated examples of COVID-19 inspired virtual

community development during a time of physical distancing. The authors suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic created potential for greater community engagement, and they apply an intersectional lens to re-explore community development in the context of social work. The implications for how community development can be taught to undergraduate social work students are discussed.

Bolger and Crosse (future issue) reflect on their respective experiences as a social work student and practice teacher, in adopting a collaborative approach to teaching, learning and practice in an interdisciplinary neurorehabilitation setting. A key focus of their work together was the development and co-facilitation of a peer support group for a cohort of patients under the age of 65. While their experience was based on a single placement, they identify key factors in collaborative practice within a student-practice teacher relationship including 1) individual traits; 2) reflective practice; and 3) learning and professional development, which will be of interest to students and practice teachers more generally. The authors were pleased to extend their collaboration post placement, to enable co-production of this article.

Approaches in supervision

Regular, reflective supervision that focuses on improving learning and practice is a core element of professional practice and practice education across disciplines. The articles in this section examine different aspects of this important topic.

The article by Norton et al. (future issue) contributes to the ongoing dialogue about improving supervision for Peer Support Workers in mental health services. By adopting an autoethnographic approach, the study provides valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Peer Support Workers in Ireland. The findings shed light on the importance of supervision, the current structure of supervision in this context, and the need for change. This research paves the way for future studies and development of guidelines for effective supervision, ultimately enhancing the quality of care and support provided by Peer Support Workers in mental health services.

Another study, conducted by McGarry (future issue) evaluated the benefits of group supervision based on responses from 8/11 social

work students and 9 practice teachers from one Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland. The students were invited to complete a pre/post-participation questionnaire, which revealed that the students increased in confidence and competence after each group supervision session. Feedback from the practice teachers also highlighted the benefits of group supervision such as the opportunity to share and learn alongside their peers. The findings demonstrate core values of social work in the provision of a supportive environment for both students and practice teachers, fostering student engagement, and enhancing outcomes. The article emphasises an ongoing commitment to evaluating and improving the group supervision programme. This innovative approach to supporting social work students during practice placement is commended and will have relevance for other organisations.

Critical and systemic theoretical frameworks

Developing and implementing theoretical frameworks that help progress understandings of practice education experiences is the unifying factor amongst the articles under this theme.

Flynn's (this issue) theoretical exploration of students on the cusp of failing a placement is framed by critical realism. Highlighting the dearth of theorisation in this area, Flynn argues that critical realism can be viewed as a theoretical tool that supports understanding of placements that are failing. Her discussion emphasises the ways in which key tenets of critical realism are closely aligned to social work values. Flynn argues that by drawing on this theory key actors involved in failing placements such as practice teachers and university tutors can develop a framework that helps them make sense of the student experience and illuminates the conditions, specific to the student perspective that are creating a climate whereby the student may fail their placement. This article makes bold suggestions that have the potential to influence approaches toward failing placements and lays the groundwork for further investigation of the relevance of critical realism to the context of student experiences of practice education.

Both McMullin et al.'s (future issue) paper, exploring interdisciplinary teaching involving social work students and drama students and Bradley et al.'s (future issue) paper exploring a pedagogical approach to professional formation in community work and youth work, draw on

Paulo Freire's pedagogy of challenging oppressive systems to empower students to take an active role in the learning process. McMullin et al.'s article offers valuable insights into the use of applied drama methods in social work education, highlighting that traditional teaching methods may not fully prepare students for the complexities they will encounter in practice. Interestingly, the simulation-based learning and role play employed, notably Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, engages students in experiential learning, critical thinking, and reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of social issues and promoting social change. The article stimulates further interest and research in applied drama methods in social work education.

Similarly, the integrated practice development strategy developed by Bradley et al. (future issue) presents a strong foundation for promoting critical praxis and empowering students to take intellectual responsibility by developing critical self-reflection, engaging in dialectic dialogue, and applying ethics, including equality and anti-discrimination principles. The article highlights the overlap in principles and practice between community work and youth work as value-based professions that uphold the values of empowerment, participation, and social justice. The article concludes by emphasising the transformative and context-specific nature of the pedagogical approach grounded in social analysis and critical reflection. It highlights the importance of embodying and enacting core principles through education while maintaining academic and professional development. This article is a valuable contribution to practice teaching and learning in community work and youth work as it provides a strong foundation for initial professional education and training, promoting critical practices and empowering students to become agents of social change.

Kelly and Walsh's (future issue) article represents a dialogue across practice and academic contexts in the west of Ireland. The authors apply Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective to explore the anomaly that although practice learning is highly valued within the profession, the provision of placements remains tangential to social work practice. The article profiles encouraging developments in partnership-working at micro and meso levels, yet problems in securing the supply of placements endure. Adoption of a whole systems approach to address the perennial problem of placement insecurity is recommended.

We hope educators, practitioners and researchers will find these articles inspiring and that they will stimulate further discussion and

exploration in the application of critical and systemic theoretical frameworks in practice teaching and learning.

Innovative models of practice teaching

With the highest volume of articles, this theme showcases the ongoing commitment to improving practice education in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The submissions demonstrate innovative models of practice teaching, some of which were prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and others that focus on addressing racial inequalities, integrating practice learning and professional registration requirements, and supporting interprofessional learning.

O'Connor and Whiting (this issue) critically reflect on the implementation of a hybrid placement model, a teaching and learning resource for students and practice teachers. The authors developed this resource with the support and input of their colleagues in The School of Social Work and Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin. The purpose of the model was to enable and support the continuation of professional social work placements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article includes an accessible diagram highlighting the four aspects of the model: onsite practice, offsite practice, online practice, and reflective practice. The authors highlight the success of the model, which was borne out of COVID-19, in enabling social work students to continue to progress their professional placements. They also consider its potential to contribute meaningfully to practice teaching and learning beyond COVID.

A second example of innovative practice is described by Whiting et al. (this issue) who reflect on the establishment of the National Practice Teaching in Social Work in Ireland (NPTSWI). This collaboration of the 6 Higher Education Institutions involved in delivery of social work education, was established with the aim of providing resources and supports that would increase and sustain social work placements in Ireland. Although the article highlights the success of NPTSWI in bringing together social work educators, the authors argue that this collaboration is only part of the solution required to manage the ongoing challenge of providing and supporting social work placements. They conclude that broader partnership working, which includes service

providers and placement sites, is required.

Olusa (this issue) critically reflects on the racial, social, and spatial inequalities faced by Black social work students on placement, which is an aspect of practice teaching and learning that has received little attention in Ireland to date. Drawing on the philosophy and letters of Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because we are", the author proposes an innovative and accessible framework. In the context of changing demographics across the social work student population, the significance of this article is clear, and its publication will hopefully prompt conversations between practice teachers and students and promote empirical research in the area.

Traynor and Rice's paper (future issue) discusses the design, development, and implementation of an interprofessional module within an undergraduate nursing programme in one university in Northern Ireland. This ambitious module undertaken by approximately 500 nursing students annually, provided ten interprofessional workstreams addressing a range of clinical issues in collaboration with disciplines of medicine and pharmacy. The authors describe the assessment component and report on the evaluation of the module using an online questionnaire. The post module evaluation highlighted increased levels of confidence among students in communicating with members of other professions and recognition of potential for mutual support. The paper will be of interest to educators across disciplines interested in developing interprofessional education and building students' capacity for practice in interprofessional teams.

McGarr and Fingleton (future issue) conducted a focus group with 5 practice educators and surveyed 168 social care students, using a mixed methods approach, to evaluate an Integrative Framework for Practice. The framework was developed in response to the publication of the Standards of Proficiency for Social Care Workers, that form part of the requirements for social care workers to be registered with CORU, the health and social care regulator in Ireland. The authors report positive feedback from the focus groups and surveys and reflect on the benefits of the framework in supporting students to evidence their competence across the required standards and as a tool to support teaching and learning as social care educators and professionals adapt to this new regulatory context. An added benefit noted by the authors is the potential of this framework, which is represented as an accessible diagram, to help social care workers situate their distinct professional identity within the

wider area of allied health and social care professionals. Thus, like the other articles discussed in this section, McGarr and Fingleton identify a use and benefit of this innovative framework beyond its original intention.

Allen and Robinson (this issue) conducted a scoping review and an exploratory, small-scale case study using mixed methods to include co-researcher and student perspectives. The authors aimed to provide a realistic understanding of what works in placement for those considering co-providing practice placements. They embarked on a reflective inquiry journey leveraging mixed methods to explore the essential components of co-practice teaching in social work. The importance of co-practice teaching is emphasised as a potential solution to the current challenges in identifying quality social work practice placements. The findings highlight important components of co-practice teaching relationships, the student experience and factors for consideration by social work practitioners when contemplating co-practice teaching. The study's mixed methodology allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions and offers a rich understanding of the topic.

Book review

Mark Doel's book entitled Social Work: The basics, 2nd edition, published by Routledge: New York and London in 2023 is reviewed by Dr Paul McCafferty, Lecturer in Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. The review which recommends the book to a wide readership, from students to experienced practitioners, takes us through the important themes addressed by the author and commends the integration of critical reflection and analysis throughout the text.

Conclusion

This special issue is a treasure trove of established practices, inspiring cutting-edge innovations and captivating insights into the myriad of challenges faced in practice teaching and learning across the island of Ireland. The authors tackle hurdles head-on, offer creative and viable

solutions that encourage possibilities and have global resonance. The issue acts as a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness across professions and jurisdictions.

Collaboration, which is emphasised by multiple authors, takes centre stage. The potential for forging alliances with practitioners, service users, and advocacy groups is vast, promising to expand, re-invigorate, and reimagine the very fabric of practice-based learning for our students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, practice teaching and learning underwent significant change, with the rapid integration of technology. While ethical concerns surrounding use of technology demand further exploration, the boundless potential for hybrid or virtual working and learning is simply awe-inspiring. We genuinely hope that this special issue captivates your interest, ignites inspiration, and proves to be a valuable resource in your work.

Our heartfelt gratitude to every author who contributed to this special issue, as well as the dedicated reviewers who provided considered and constructive feedback. A special thanks to the editor of the *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, Dr Prospera Tedam

Finally, we would like to pay tribute to our friend and colleague, Dr Helen Cleak from Melbourne, Australia, who died in May 2023. As a leading academic in practice teaching and learning, with close ties to social work education across Ireland, her legacy and passion for social work education, will forever inspire us.

Erna O'Connor,
Audrey Roulston
Sinead Whiting and Oluromade Olusa
Guest Co-Editors

Obituary: Dr Helen Cleak

Dr Helen Cleak, who sadly died on 18th May 2023, made an enormous contribution to social work practice and education over a 50-year period. She worked in hospital social work for 20 years and for the past 30 years has been a leading social work academic in practice teaching and learning. Most recently she held the position of Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Allied Health, Human Service and Sport, La Trobe University, in her native Melbourne and was formerly Associate Professor, School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Helen was the Director of Field Education and International placements at La Trobe University, Melbourne for over 20 years. Whilst caring and supportive towards students, she upheld very high standards in field education. She supervised many PhD students, who found her supportive, sensitive, and kind. She was committed to excellence, motivated and inspired students and colleagues, and leaves an important legacy within academia and field education. She was a long-standing member on the Editorial Board of Australian Social Work Journal and was a member of the Expert panel to review the ASWEAS guidelines on field education.

Over the years, she published 75 articles, editorials and books which spanned research into aspects of hospital social work, partner and family violence, family mediation, childhood neglect, elder abuse, practice teaching and student supervision. *'Making the Most of Field Placement'* which she co-authored with Jill Wilson is now in its 5th edition, offers a practice-based approach to teaching and learning during placement experiences for both students and supervisors.

In the past 12 years, Helen made several trips to Queen's University Belfast, and Trinity College, Dublin, as a Visiting Fellow. During each visit she presented guest lectures and workshops to practice teachers, academics, and personal tutors, or collaborated on international research projects and publications with colleagues from Queen's University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork, and the University of Galway. One such example is the development and adaption of a survey she originally conducted in 2012 with colleagues in Australia, exploring student satisfaction with supervision and learning

activities that promoted competence on placement. This was replicated in 2014 with social work students at Queen's University and Ulster University (Northern Ireland), prior to being administered in 2016 to social work students from Trinity College Dublin and the University of Galway (Ireland), and in 2020 with students from the University of Tampere, Finland.

In 2016, Helen was a key-note speaker at the Whiting and Birch, 11th International Practice Teaching Conference in the Europa Hotel, Belfast. More recently, Helen contributed a pre-recorded presentation at the 2023 NPTSWI conference 'Educating together for practice teaching in social work in the 21st Century' at University College Cork, which focused on research she conducted with colleagues in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Helen's three children, Lincoln, Andrew and Tess, described Helen's default nature as putting the needs of others before her own. She made sacrifices so that she could travel around the world on holiday with her children, or for work. As a mother, sister, aunt, friend, and colleague, she was passionate, hard-working, tenacious, fearless, inspiring, stoic, caring, determined and non-judgemental. She loved going to the gym, playing tennis and golf, hosting dinner parties, and walking.

As colleagues and friends, we would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution that Helen made to social work practice, research and education in Australia, Northern Ireland, Ireland and beyond. She taught us the importance of balancing an engaged, productive professional life with staying fit, having fun, travelling, and prioritising family, friends and colleagues.

Audrey Roulston and Erna O'Connor