

“What Are They Banging On About?”: The Student Experience Of DRUMBEAT As A Field Education Groupwork Activity

Nicky Wright¹, Aimee Smith², Emily Saurman³

Nicky Wright, Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH), The University of Sydney

Aimee Smith, Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH), The University of Sydney
Aimee.smith@sydney.edu.au

Emily Saurman, Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH), The University of Sydney
Emily.saurman@sydney.edu.au, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6273-4769>

Corresponding author: Nicky Wright

Nicola.wright@sydney.edu.au

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the students for sharing their stories and BHUDRH staff, Paul Bennett and Dr Debra Jones, for their assistance with data collection and analysis. We acknowledge that DRUMBEAT is a registered program of Holyoake and give thanks to Tara Sita, formerly associated with the organisation, for her contributions early on in this project. The Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.

Abstract

Field education plays a significant role in social work education in Australia. Providing students with a valuable and enjoyable field education placement experience is inherently complex, with multiple players and competing demands. In 2016, the Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH) introduced DRUMBEAT as a student-led groupwork activity for social work service learning placements in far west New South Wales, Australia. This paper outlines findings of a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews and fieldnotes to understand the experiences of social work students facilitating DRUMBEAT and determine its value for continuation as a service-learning field education activity. Students' lived experiences of facilitating DRUMBEAT were understood in three stages: training, organisation, and delivery of DRUMBEAT and two emergent themes: professional value and personal reward. Students readily identified DRUMBEAT as relevant to their learning journey and future practice. Challenges enabled them to develop a stronger professional identity. Students enjoyed DRUMBEAT and developed self-awareness and confidence through their experience. A valuable placement activity both nourishes students as people and challenges them professionally. The BHUDRH can confidently continue to incorporate DRUMBEAT in its service-learning placements as an experience that has relevance for social work practice while providing a valuable service within host organisations.

Keywords: *Field education; Social work placements; DRUMBEAT; Rural; Service learning*

Introduction

Field education is a compulsory and valuable part of social work education (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2015, p. 15). Since 2010, The Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BHUDRH) has coordinated rural field education placements in far west NSW, Australia for Bachelor and Masters (Qualifying) social work students from multiple Australian universities. Field education placements are aligned with the service-learning pedagogy whereby they have mutual benefit for students and the community, add to the service delivery capability of local organisations, and facilitate the development of work-readiness alongside discipline-specific skills (Eyler, 2002, pp. 517–518; Shanti et al., 2021). In 2016, in response to community identified concerns about the social and emotional wellbeing of young people, the BHUDRH introduced the Holyoake DRUMBEAT program (Holyoake, 2020a) as a social-work-student-led, service-learning placement activity, within their host organisation. The primary aim of this study was to understand the experiences of social work students facilitating DRUMBEAT as a placement activity in order to determine its value as a service-learning field education activity at the BHUDRH.

Background

Field Education

At approximately 500 hours per placement (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2012, p. 3), the lengthy structure of field education provides an opportunity for students to be active contributors to service delivery through the translation of their theoretical understanding of social work skills and knowledge into real world practice (Lee & Fortune, 2013, pp. 646–649; Papouli, 2014, pp. 4–5). It is, therefore, essential that students are positioned as assets to their host organisation and service recipients. It is not only important to consider what students do and learn while on placement, but understand how their experience nourishes them, how they feel about the experience, and how they maintain good self-care (Drolet & McLennan, 2016; Litvack et al., 2010, p. 239). Students, like all professionals, are juggling a personal life with professional commitments, have an emotional investment in (and reaction to) the work they are doing, and are equally vulnerable to the potential for burnout and vicarious trauma (Lewis & King, 2019, p. 96; Moore et al., 2011, pp. 545–546). An enjoyable experience and a sense of reward are equally essential considerations for field education placements.

DRUMBEAT

DRUMBEAT (Discovering Relationships Using Music, Beliefs, Emotions, Attitudes and Thoughts) is an evidence-based groupwork program developed in 2003 by a team at Holyoake – a non-government organisation (NGO) in Western Australia (Holyoake, 2020c). The core theme of DRUMBEAT is healthy relationships. It uses djembe drums and rhythm to support the development of social and emotional skills for children, young people and adults. The program combines drumming, discussion, games and activities relating to six themes: *The Rhythm of Life, Relationships, Teamwork, Community and Identity, Emotions and Feelings, and Harmony*. Analogies are used to draw links between the experience of drumming and interactions within the group, to life and relationships outside of it (Faulkner et al., 2010, pp. 100–101). Holyoake stipulates that the DRUMBEAT program should be delivered by two

facilitators, one of whom must first participate in their three-day facilitator training program (Holyoake, 2020b).

About the study

Social work students on a field education placement with the BHUDRH participate in the DRUMBEAT facilitator training to enable them to facilitate the program as part of their placement.

In addition to its alignment with the service-learning pedagogy and responsiveness to community identified needs, there were three rationales for introducing DRUMBEAT as a student-led placement activity. It aligned to social work values, purpose and model of practice, with the potential to aid the development of social work skills and knowledge. Its universal relevance and flexible structure meant it could be implemented in multiple settings and with diverse participant groups. Being a 10-session program, it also fits pragmatically within an approximate 14-week placement.

Within social work, the premise of any research study is to inform action and create positive change (Flynn & McDermott, 2016, Chapter 2). Previous DRUMBEAT studies have focused primarily on the outcomes for group participants (Faulkner et al., 2012, p. 33; Martin et al., 2014, pp. 9–14). As this qualitative study was designed to understand students' experience of facilitating DRUMBEAT it will address a gap in knowledge by focusing on the facilitator experience. Findings will inform BHUDRH decisions on students' future involvement with the program.

Method

The study design draws on phenomenology to explore student insights within the context of facilitating DRUMBEAT (Padgett, 2012, pp. 35–36), reflecting the value of their voice and enabling them to be “active participants in, and creators of, the contexts and frameworks through which we practise” (Healy, 2005, p. 4).

Ethical approval (2017/876) was granted through the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

Participants

Participants were social work students as facilitators of DRUMBEAT who received the three-day facilitator training; were involved in the organisation and setup of the program at their host organisation; and/or facilitated the DRUMBEAT program as a placement activity while undertaking a field education placement through the BHUDRH over three semesters in 2017–2018. All 20 eligible students were invited to participate in the study, and 18 consented. They were all female Bachelor students from five universities and four were on their first placement.

Recruitment procedures

Students were invited to participate via the email address they supplied in their placement application. To avoid any real or perceived coercion, a BHUDRH administration assistant not associated with the study sent the invitation and information letter with accompanying consent and withdrawal forms.

The correspondence informed students that participation was voluntary. It was made clear that not participating would in no way affect their relationship with the BHUDRH or access to field education opportunities, including facilitating DRUMBEAT, and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Students were required to provide written consent to a BHUDRH administrator prior to their participation via email, regular post, or during placement orientation.

At the time of application, none of the students were aware that facilitating DRUMBEAT would be a placement activity and all students had limited knowledge of the program prior to starting.

Data collection

Qualitative methods were used. Two individual semi-structured interviews (one at the end of the placement and the second six months post-placement) were conducted by two BHUDRH academic staff members unconnected to DRUMBEAT and social work student field education placements (one being coauthor ES). Field notes were collected by first author and lead investigator (NW) and another BHUDRH social work academic (coauthor AS) responsible for overseeing coordination of social work placements and direct supervision of some students. The use of qualitative data collection methods assisted methodological rigor and credibility through triangulation.

End of placement face-to-face individual interview

The first interview was conducted near the end of each student's placement, but before they returned home. The purpose was to seek a rich and deep insight into their lived experience as facilitators of DRUMBEAT. This interview was guided by eight broad topics (see Box 1). Prompts about the different stages of facilitating DRUMBEAT (training, organisation and setup, and delivery) were used to expand their responses.

BOX 1. End-of-Placement Interview Topics

1. Reasons for choosing a placement with the BHUDRH program
2. Any prior knowledge of DRUMBEAT
3. Initial feelings about DRUMBEAT as a placement activity
4. Experience of DRUMBEAT
5. Perspectives on whether involvement in DRUMBEAT had professional value
6. Challenges encountered
7. Relevance for future practice
8. Invitation to describe their experience to other social work students

Each participant could also self-nominate for a second interview conducted by telephone six-months post-placement, guided by five broad topics (see Box 2). Ten of the 18 (from four universities, two on their first placement) participated in the follow-up telephone interview.

BOX 2. Six-Month Post-Placement Follow-up Interview Topics

1. Invitation to reflect on their involvement in DRUMBEAT
2. Significance of DRUMBEAT to their overall placement experience
3. Perspectives on whether involvement in DRUMBEAT had professional value
4. Application of learnings from the DRUMBEAT experience since placement ended
5. Invitation to describe their experience to other social work students

Researcher fieldnotes

Fieldnotes were collected by the two BHUDRH social work academics (NW, AS). They recorded all formal and informal correspondence with the students through their day-to-day business of placements; researcher observations and reflections; feedback from third-party stakeholders; and documented mentions of DRUMBEAT within students' written assessment items.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is essential to the self-awareness of the researcher. Inherent to the role of an insider-researcher is the potential for bias, the influences of subjectivity, and the “permeability of boundaries” (Humphrey, 2012, p. 577). As first author and lead investigator (NW), I recognise and acknowledge my involvement in the study topic. I initiated and have ongoing responsibility for DRUMBEAT as a placement activity and I am an accredited group facilitator and trainer in the program. My relationship with students extends beyond DRUMBEAT to include oversight of their placements and supervision for some. As a consequence, researcher objectivity is challenging because my personal and professional perspectives resulting from my involvement in the program can inform and influence the research process (Fook, 2002, pp. 92–93). However, this insider status has also enabled the potential for rich understandings that may have eluded others less involved (Berger, 2015, pp. 222–224). The risks of bias were managed with: self-reflection through a research journal; distancing from the interview process; and triangulation of data through collaborative coding of initial interviews and regular meetings with the research team where my ideas and interpretations were tested.

Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Fieldnote data were used to provide richness and depth to the analysis. The interviews and fieldnotes were linked using an identifier code to maintain confidentiality.

Data analysis included deductive and inductive processes, acknowledging and reflecting the complexity of social work practice. Analysis focused on describing and interpreting the data by making meaning from the common elements in the lived experiences of the study participants (Padgett, 2012, p. 173). It became clear that their experience could be understood deductively in three chronological stages:

1. Facilitator training
2. Organisation and setup
3. Session delivery, with the inductively identified subthemes of:
 - a. group facilitation
 - b. DRUMBEAT performance
 - c. conducting participant evaluations
 - d. co-facilitator relationships

In examining the data, evidence for two additional inductive themes developed:

4. Professional value, which included:
 - a. integration of theory and practice
 - b. practical skills
 - c. supervision
 - d. future applicability
5. Personal reward

These are two sides of the same coin, and the inevitable use of self in social work practice was no less so for students.

It was important that the study remained true to the reflective approach whereby the study participant (social work student), and not the researcher, was central to the study (Healy, 2005, p. 102). Evidence from the data is therefore reflected using italics and comes from multiple study participants. Individual quotes are linked to an individual identifier code.

Results

Overall initial reactions to DRUMBEAT as a placement activity were positive. Any initial apprehension was about the actual drumming – “[I] thought we’d have to learn and be good at all these crazy rhythms” (Student 5) – but this was counterbalanced by the reassurance of having a pre-determined placement activity. A session introducing the DRUMBEAT program during orientation helped build knowledge and foster enthusiastic engagement. By the end of orientation, students considered DRUMBEAT as relevant to social work, an opportunity for learning, and professionally valuable for their future.

1. Facilitator training

In accordance with Holyoake's requirement for facilitators to be trained, the BHUDRH organised for the students to receive the three-day, face-to-face training. It was delivered locally and aligned with the start of social work placements each semester. Interested health, education, NGO staff, and others could also register to attend thereby increasing the students' opportunity for interprofessional learning and developing professional connections, as well as building and maintaining a high number of trained facilitators in the local region.

Training was described as *intense, draining and content heavy*, but equally as *enjoyable*, and *engaging*, with *lots of laughter*. Factors that contributed to a positive experience were the mix of trainees and a positive regard for the trainer and the training structure.

The opportunity to learn alongside other professionals was appreciated for the *practice wisdom, support, and opportunity to observe different facilitation styles*. However, it was also *intimidating*, as the other professionals were perceived to have more experience and knowledge – even though they, too, had no prior experience with DRUMBEAT. Training was an opportunity for networking, developing relationships, and useful when arriving in a new town.

The training was still *nerve-racking*, as expected with any new experience. Discomfort stemmed from activities where students felt *exposed* or *put on the spot*, such as having to lead an activity. Although disarming, these experiences were valuable because they helped alleviate anxiety about drumming and offered insight into how participants may feel. Practice meant fewer nerves when *doing it for real*.

Having to [lead an activity] pushes you a bit further, but it is so necessary ... even though you are uncomfortable and quite nervous, I think it's better to get that out in the space where you are supported and there are other trainers around, rather than in the first session because you want to have a bit more confidence then. (Student 5)

Students also experienced some of the expected benefits of DRUMBEAT, such as feeling *calm, energised, and enjoyment* of drumming. Training helped students *make sense* of the program and prepared them for facilitation. The experiential learning structure of the training, coupled with the trainers' modeling of groupwork skills, deepened their understanding of DRUMBEAT. Students quickly recognised its *adaptability* and *flexibility*. They understood the *freedom* in how it could be delivered, and that, to meet the needs of participants, it may be necessary to *chuck out the plan*. However, when students experienced significant challenges in the facilitation of DRUMBEAT, they connected this with shortcomings in the training content.

2. Organisation and setup

Student involvement in the logistical planning of DRUMBEAT within their host organisations and in the selection of group participants varied. While students described this stage as *disorganised*, *last minute* and *confused*, navigating the complexity was doable when the host organisation was supportive; “we’ll do whatever it takes to make sure we do [DRUMBEAT]” (Student 4). When planned groups never eventuated, students felt this was due to a lack of organisational interest and support for the program.

Some host organisations incorporated DRUMBEAT as part of their service delivery model and assigned this initiative to their social work students as a primary placement activity. Within these organisations, drums, a venue, participants, and an agency staff member to co-facilitate were generally available. Some students had to adjust their expectations of the planning process to fit with organisational limitations. Adaptations included sharing drums with other organisations, being flexible with the choice of venue due to availability, and scheduling groups at non-preferred times to accommodate the competing priorities of co-facilitators, participants, and their own study demands.

On reflection, students identified that the physical space where groups were held, and associations their participants had with that space, were influential to the smooth facilitation of DRUMBEAT. A room with minimal disruptions was important to develop relationships and emotional safety.

Participant selection was typically collaborative with organisation staff. Students appreciated feeling their input was heard and considered, but also recognised the value of the background knowledge staff had about potential group participants. Students applied what they had learnt from the facilitator training to advocate for both individual participants and the overall group mix. They offered opinions about cultural and gender mix, the importance of voluntary participation, and the universal relevance of DRUMBEAT topics to minimise the selection of participants because of specific social emotional challenges.

For some, groups were selected either prior to the start of placement or students felt their opinions were not valued in the selection process. A few were expected to co-facilitate groups that had already started without receiving background information about participants. This lack of ownership of DRUMBEAT negatively impacted opportunities for learning and enjoyment of the experience, which contributed to a general sense of being neither needed nor valued by their host organisation.

Student suggestions for host organisations and guidance for future social work students included more considered participant selection to ensure greater diversity, voluntary participation, selection of people with similar ages and development, and ideas on how participants could continue drumming outside of the set program. They initiated strategies such as leaving a *list of suitable participants*, *documenting what they had done*, and listing *which staff to speak to* about organising groups. They also suggested future students provide presentations and demonstrations for staff as a strategy to address organisational misunderstandings about the DRUMBEAT ethos.

3. Session delivery

Students facilitated the DRUMBEAT program for between one and four separate participant groups, each with 3–12 participants, with weekly individual group sessions. They described feeling *nervous*, *daunted* and *clumsy* in the early groups, but, by the end *confident*, describing the overall experience as *enjoyable*, *fun*, and *worthwhile*.

The first week we were quite nervous because we didn't really know what we were doing and we didn't have step by step, minute by minute idea of how things were going to go ... but as time went on you obviously get less nervous and make it more fluent. (Student 17)

Students actively sought out additional drumming opportunities, including using DRUMBEAT activities one-on-one, for self-care, as information sessions for staff, and as a drum circle activity at community events. Students encouraged future social work students to *not be afraid to venture, to adapt, or to make mistakes*.

The enjoyment of delivering DRUMBEAT cannot be confused with it being smooth sailing. Some challenges were isolated to particular sessions and generally resolvable, but others were more broadly experienced: maintaining participant numbers, managing disengaged or disruptive participants and inter-personal dynamics, and balancing the content delivery with the emotional needs of participants.

Sub-themes of DRUMBEAT delivery were: facilitation, the closing performance, participant evaluation, and co-facilitator relationships.

a. Group facilitation

Students aligned their facilitation with the values and principles that underpin DRUMBEAT and focused on practice that demonstrated equality, reciprocity, and working with participants rather than being authoritative. This was particularly evidenced in their advocacy for individual *choice* to participate or not, collaborative making of group guidelines, consideration of *inclusion* and *equality* in all decisions, and their use of the program's *flexibility* to be person-centred.

Students identified that participant engagement and behaviour was influenced equally by the immediate emotional state of individuals and their developmental readiness for the topics, discussions, drumming, and activities. Students adapted the program accordingly, balancing emotional needs with ensuring that the group process reflected the session's key content.

Maintaining group facilitation, while also addressing participant interpersonal conflict or responding to an individual disclosure of abuse or neglect was challenging and, at times, threatened to derail the whole group. In such examples, students prioritised participant physical and emotional safety through strategies like using drumming to de-escalate, respectful redirection of discussions, active follow-up after the group, and escalation of concerns through appropriate organisational channels when needed.

b. Performance

Students demonstrated considerable determination in preparing their participants for the performance and it was a *highlight* of the program, marking an achievement for both students and their group participants. They strove for participants to take ownership of decisions, including the audience and rhythms to be performed. Sometimes this required students to push back on directives from the organisation or co-facilitators who wanted to showcase DRUMBEAT as part of another organisational event. Upholding the principle of participant decision making came with the challenges of balancing their wishes with feasibility, achieving group consensus, and managing participant emotions.

c. Group participant evaluations

The DRUMBEAT program incorporates a range of internal evaluation options, in the form of formal participant evaluation questionnaires provided by Holyoake. Students were aware of these and acknowledged that evaluation was encouraged in the facilitator training and by their social work supervisors. Despite this, student engagement in the evaluation process was limited. They felt evaluation was not a priority for their host organisations, that they lacked time to get evaluations completed, and were concerned about participants not understanding the language or emojis used in the tools. They did not consider adapting the evaluation process to fit the needs of their participants as they had with the rest of the program. When evaluations were completed, and concerns were identified, students discussed these with staff for follow-up.

d. Co-facilitator relationships

The importance of the co-facilitator relationship to the facilitation of DRUMBEAT was significant and the source of much angst and/or joy. Co-facilitators were typically staff from the host organisation, only some of whom had also completed the facilitator training and had previous program delivery experience.

Positive co-facilitator relationships involved effective communication, collaboration, appreciation of each other's strengths, skills and knowledge, and shared facilitation. When communication was effective, students described their co-facilitators as *easy to talk to*, *receptive*, *prompt* and *respectful*. Collaboration was highlighted through use of the words *we* and *together* indicating a sense of mutual value and teamwork, with both parties open to suggestions and input from the other. These things were most evident when students had regular planning and debrief meetings with their co-facilitator to *figure things out* prior to sessions and to *receive constructive feedback*. Students appreciated being *able to take the lead*, while having the safety net of a co-facilitator who would *step in* when needed but then *hand it back*. This was described as *meeting in the middle* and *bouncing off each other*.

The successes we had were shared successes because we were on same level...every success felt really important, and every loss felt like okay, let's put our heads together. No one person had answers for us...there is that real professional value in that. (Student 12)

Tensions stemmed from inter-professional differences, inconsistent and/or limited contact outside of group sessions, and a perceived disregard/disrespect toward the students. While students strove to uphold the DRUMBEAT protocol, some co-facilitators wanted a formal, structured and *strict* delivery of the program. Program manuals were seen as a plan rather than a guide, with the focus on outcomes rather than group process. Students wanted flexibility so they could be responsive to the emotional needs and requests of participants on the day. In the most extreme examples, students were concerned about how co-facilitators addressed problematic participant behaviours.

[Co-facilitator] was very much follow the book, make sure everything's learnt – that's the most important part. I was more on the line of just go with what they want and adapt to what they need...our different views on the program sort of made things a bit of a muddle. (Student 2)

4. Professional value

Students identified DRUMBEAT as a *valuable, relevant and significant learning experience* with *amazing opportunity* for professional learning across multiple social work domains, with value for future practice. Specifically, the translation of social work values, theory, and role into practice; opportunity to develop practical skills; and insight into the value of creative arts. DRUMBEAT helped students to *solidify what social work is*, develop their professional identity, and help non-social work staff to *understand what a social worker does*. Learning was supported by supervision and hindered by limitations to facilitate and/or have regular support and feedback from co-facilitators.

a. Integration of theory and practice

"Our social work values are easily integrated into [DRUMBEAT]" (Student 15). Most notable were opportunities to demonstrate *inclusive* and *person-centred* practice, *empower* participants and *encourage self-determination*, focus on skills and *strengths*, and demonstrate *community* and *teamwork* by promoting a sense of belonging.

DRUMBEAT is the intersection of a lot of values and themes that social work represents of community, self-exploration, self-expression, but also understanding the role and value of team work and common goals. (Student 10)

While the explicit mention of specific social work theory was limited, students identified DRUMBEAT as a *strengths-based groupwork program* (Healy, 2005, pp. 152–171; Kelly, 2015, p. 69). In addition to identifying the challenges participants were facing, they were able to identify what was going well, what personal character strengths, knowledge and skills participants had, and what supports and strategies were available to them to face their challenges, have healthy relationships and experience *human flourishing*.

It's a program where they're trying to empower and trying to build their strengths up, to highlight the strengths that they already have. I feel like whenever we talk about things like what are your strengths, or what do you like, how do you deal with anger and all that stuff, it's a way to draw that out from the participants and I think a lot of what social work does...like assisting them, supporting them, like walking beside them and I think DRUMBEAT – what the program stands for is a lot of working together. (Student 17)

Trauma-informed theory was also in student reflections. Students understood the impacts of trauma experiences and the potential for these to influence behaviour (Evans, 2014, Chapter 3) and sought to respond in a trauma informed way. They wanted to understand rather than judge challenging behaviours and recognised the self-regulating benefits of participant engagement in a rhythm-based activity (Ascenso et al., 2018, pp. 9–10; Yap et al., 2017, pp. 45–47).

Students considered groupwork a *really appropriate* practice model for social work, along with the focus on *wellbeing, resilience, relationships, communication, and emotional intelligence*. Tuckman's model of groupwork (Tuckman, 1965, pp. 384–399) was the only reference to any formal theory of groupwork, but many of the students had not yet completed a groupwork unit at university. This practical experience was considered advantageous because students felt confident and knowledgeable upon returning to university.

b. Practical skills

Working with a group is different than working one-on-one and while this was initially *confusing* and *overwhelming*, student confidence and skill grew with practice and *trial and error*. Students described this groupwork approach as preventative, rather than crisis-driven and an opportunity to develop new skills that other experiences at university or previous placements had not provided. The experience highlighted the importance of being *flexible, open* and *adaptable*, and practicing in a way that reflects a responsive, person-centred and respectful social work approach.

With DRUMBEAT I think what the biggest thing I've gotten out of it is about how group sessions work ... it is important to make sure participants want to be there. It's important to have a planned session, but also be adaptable to what is going on with [participants] and what they're feeling on that day. (Student 2)

DRUMBEAT was an *outside-the-box* groupwork program that helped students develop insight into how a creative medium can enhance social work practice and this shifted their perspectives on what is possible for their future practice. The drums aided the development of a therapeutic relationship through a *playful, fun* and *non-intimidating* engagement with the content. The drums also provided a non-verbal way to engage with each other and communicate emotion. Groupwork-specific skills included: *organisational skills* such as the logistics of rooms and timetabling, preparation and knowledge of material; *facilitation* including use of power, working with a co-facilitator, managing behaviour and group dynamics; and *structuring sessions* by adapting DRUMBEAT material to meet the emotional needs of participants.

Enhanced communication skills were another significant area of professional growth. These skills were developed with co-facilitators through finding ways to provide and receive feedback, share insights, challenge perspectives, and advocate for alternate approaches to address participant behaviour.

It's such an important thing of working with different professionals that you have an understanding of how to approach challenging conversations and to be respectful of their professional space but also their personal feelings ... it's been really important to go okay, these are the things that I need to work towards because this is part of my role [at host site]. (Student 11)

Communication skills were also developed with participants by initiating and engaging in group discussions, adapting language to ensure understanding, responding to disclosures of abuse, acknowledging individual opinions while managing the impact of these on the group, interpreting rather than judging behaviour, and being approachable and not misusing the inherent power of being a facilitator.

c. Supervision

Having access to professional social work supervision from someone familiar with the program was valuable for learning. It allowed for *modeling*, collaborative problem solving, *sharing ideas* and *practical suggestions*, *integration of theory*, and further prompts for *self-reflection*. Learning was negatively impacted by groups being held sporadically (or not at all) as this limited the opportunity to develop and practise skills. Professional learning was also influenced by co-facilitator availability and skill in providing feedback. In these instances, access to supervision with a social worker familiar with DRUMBEAT was compensatory.

d. Future applicability

At the end of placement, students wanted to use DRUMBEAT in their future practice. Sometimes this was a vague expression of intent – *love to*, *open to it*, *hope to* – and for others, a more concrete idea of possibility – *future placement*, *volunteer work* and *current employment*. Students discussed applying for full accreditation with Holyoake and plans to add DRUMBEAT Facilitator to their resumes. Irrespective of who their group participants were on placement, they recognised the transferability of DRUMBEAT to other groups such as refugees, people with disabilities, and those with mental health challenges. They had a comprehensive understanding of the purpose and goals of the program, felt that it aligned to social work, and had self-assessed that they now had the skills and confidence to deliver it.

Despite their intent, six months post-placement, no student had facilitated DRUMBEAT again. This was not a reflection of value: students felt that what they had learnt would *stick with them*, *influence the kind of work* they wanted to do, and had provided them new insights, skills and knowledge applicable to their future practice – even if they never became involved in DRUMBEAT or drumming again.

5. Personal reward

DRUMBEAT was *fun, enjoyable* and a *highlight of the week*. Students encouraged future social work students to be open to the possibilities of this *unique and worth doing* experience. It was considered to be personally rewarding, with prompts for self-reflection, therapeutic benefit and opportunities to develop confidence.

[DRUMBEAT] is such an adaptable program that you can make it you. You don't have to be a musical creative person. It's really quite simple...you can really adapt it to what you want to get out of it, and you can bring yourself into it. (Student 15)

The universal relevance of the relationship topics and group discussions reminded students of *what is important* to them, what *triggers their emotional reactions* and how they *deal with* these, as well as provided insight into areas they needed to work on, such as *letting go of control, recognising strengths*, and *negative self-talk*. There was reciprocal learning, with participants instrumental in this process through their comments, feedback, and personal insights.

I've looked at the way that I handled DRUMBEAT and found areas within myself that I can work on, strengths I can develop but also blind spots I need to address...I need to harness [strengths] and work out how to use them better and have more confidence in myself. (Student 10)

DRUMBEAT helped students develop a sense of *maturity, self-confidence and achievement* through learning a new skill and taking leadership of something they saw as successful. This linked to *feeling proud* when group participants were engaged in the program. Students also felt the therapeutic benefits of drumming, including reduced stress.

... there are times when I have been quite stressed and then one of the girls will start doing the Heartbeat [rhythm]...I am like oh this is really good. Thank you, I needed that actually. So it has actually taught me too about how much drumming – that regular rhythm – can really help with calming emotions. (Student 5)

Despite the general positivity, students rarely engaged in drumming outside of their placement, or intended to drum in the future. At six months post-placement, no student had continued drumming recreationally.

Discussion

The student experience of DRUMBEAT facilitation reflected many of the characteristics of effective field education in Australia, by providing them with the opportunity for the integration of theory and practice: a time to translate, test, and practise their academic understanding of the social work profession. DRUMBEAT afforded students this professional opportunity through an activity that was not only enjoyable but personally beneficial.

Students readily identified their experience facilitating DRUMBEAT as relevant to their learning and professional journey: appropriate as a placement task, aligned to their intellectual understanding of the social work role and purpose, and relevant to their future practice. Their early buy-in meant that DRUMBEAT was approached with a positive attitude, even when accompanied by apprehension. Students sustained this positivity when there was organisational and co-facilitator support for DRUMBEAT and the student role within it, often resulting in them engaging in more DRUMBEAT and drumming-related activities than originally planned.

Facilitating DRUMBEAT was valuable for addressing some of the complexities of placement (or the working environment). It helped students to build relationships with staff and service users, provided students and organisations with a clear placement direction and a defined social work student role within the agency, and supported the framing of students as assets through the facilitation of a valued service.

The learning value of facilitating DRUMBEAT was greatest when it was about having an involved and supported, but also imperfect, experience that reflected real-world practice. It was not always smooth sailing, as was evident in students' considerations and planning, their frustrations and challenges, and even in their successes and joys. Challenges enabled students to better identify their professional position and, by default rather than intent, develop a stronger social work professional identity. Challenges were evident in a number of areas, including: values, group processes, co-facilitator, and theoretical knowledge. Navigating these challenges supported students to develop skills in flexibility, negotiation, and advocacy, all of which are necessary social work skills (Trevithick, 2012, Chapter 9) .

Akin to all social work groupwork, DRUMBEAT required students to be nimble (Lindsay & Orton, 2014, p. 58). Students were better able to experience growth, achievement, and success when they became comfortable with expecting the unexpected, applied a growth mindset to their experience and were able to seek and incorporate feedback from others. Challenges with participants were always perceived as fertile ground for learning, but with those related to organisations and co-facilitators, there was a tipping point when struggle outweighed learning. These included organisations no longer wanting or prioritising DRUMBEAT; the absence of mutual professional respect with the co-facilitator; absence of a shared vision to maintain the integrity of the program; and irregular provision of constructive feedback for the student.

However, it was not all about learning. In the context of a field education placement experience that is inherently demanding, and in a profession where the potential for burnout is widely recognised (Drolet & McLennan, 2016; Miller, 2020, p. 258), enjoyment of DRUMBEAT was equally important. Student enjoyment was linked to that of their group participants and to the opportunity for creativity. This enjoyment, combined with the therapeutic benefits of the drumming, went some way to addressing self-care needs.

The use of self is an important consideration in social work (Dewane, 2005, pp. 543–544) and the unexamined self holds potential for harm to others, through the unwitting projection

of biases and prejudices, as well as clumsy and underdeveloped communication and interpersonal (Gardner, 2001, p. 27; Healy, 2018, Chapter 2). The DRUMBEAT experience had inbuilt prompts for self-reflection and new insights, with the topics and discussions mutually beneficial for group participants and student facilitators.

A field education placement experience that enabled students to engage in real work, of real value, where their contributions had positive impacts on service users, resulted in a sense of achievement and increased self-confidence. Confidence is pervasive; what is felt personally translates professionally. A sense of “I can do this”, reinforced that they were ready to transition to their next placement or from student to practitioner.

Study limitations

A possible limitation is that the study focused solely on the experience of social work students facilitating DRUMBEAT as a placement activity during a rural field education placement. However, as they were trained facilitators, and for all intents and purposes practising professionals, the findings have relevance for other DRUMBEAT facilitators, including those from other disciplines or at different stages of the professional journey. More research would be valuable in exploring this further.

There were some limitations in the data-collection process. While one interviewer would have been ideal for consistency, two were necessary due to interviewer availability. However, the impact of this on the findings was inconsequential as the interviewers had similar familiarity with the project and used the same topics to guide the interviews, resulting in comparable findings. There was also some inconsistency in the collection of fieldnotes by the two BHUDRH social work academics. As they had different professional responsibilities with individual students and were not always the social work supervisor, more contact led to more fieldnote data. Because fieldnotes were not the sole or primary data source, this had a negligible impact on the study findings. As study participants were invited over three semesters, organisational understanding and planning for DRUMBEAT modified with time, and may have influenced the student experience. Lastly, because some students had not yet graduated or begun their next placement, transferability of skills and knowledge acquired through the experience of facilitating DRUMBEAT may have been less evident at the six-month, follow-up interview than if interviews had been conducted 12 months post-placement.

Conclusion

Field education placements are inherently significant and complex. Through sharing their lived experiences, students have contributed to an understanding of what makes a valuable placement activity; one that both nourishes them as people and challenges them professionally. While the student experiences were varied and influenced by organisational and other variables, they reflected real-world practice that contributed to their work-readiness and development of a professional identity. The BHUDRH can confidently continue to incorporate DRUMBEAT in its service-learning placements as an experience that aligns with and has relevance for social work practice while also providing a valuable service within organisations.

References

- Ascenso, S., Perkins, R., Atkins, L., Fancourt, D., & Williamon, A. (2018). Promoting well-being through group drumming with mental health service users and their carers. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 13(1), 1484219–1484215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2018.1484219>
- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2012). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards (ASWEAS): Guideline 1.2: Guidance on field education programs*. <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3553>
- Australian Association of Social Workers. (2015). *Australian social work education and accreditation standards (ASWEAS) 2012 V1.4*. <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/3550>
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research: QR*, 15(2), 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Dewane, C. J. (2005). Use of self: A primer revisited. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 34(4), 543–558. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-005-0021-5>
- Drolet, J., & McLennan, C. (2016). Wellness and relational self-care in social work field education. *The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society*, 6(4), 9–21. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18848/2156-8960/CGP/v06i04/9-21>
- Evans, A. (2014). *Trauma-informed care: How neuroscience influences practice*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315815572>
- Eyler, J. (2002). Reflection: Linking service and learning—Linking students and communities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(3), 517–534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4560.00274>
- Faulkner, S., Ivery, P., Wood, L., & Donovan, R. (2010). Holyoake's DRUMBEAT program: Music as a tool for social learning and improved educational outcomes. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 39, 98–109. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1375/S1326011100000958>
- Faulkner, S., Wood, L., Ivery, P., & Donovan, R. (2012). It is not just music and rhythm . . . Evaluation of a drumming-based intervention to improve the social wellbeing of alienated youth. *Children Australia*, 37(1), 31–39. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.5>
- Flynn, C., & McDermott, F. (2016). *Doing research in social work and social care*. SAGE Publications.
- Fook, J. (2002). Theorizing from practice: Towards an inclusive approach to social work research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/147332500200100106>
- Gardner, F. (2001). Social work students and self-awareness: How does it happen? *Reflective Practice*, 2(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/14623940120035505>
- Healy, K. (2005). *Social work theories in context*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healy, K. (2018). *The skilled communicator in social work: The art and science of communication in practice*. Macmillan Science & Education.
- Holyoake. (2020a). *Building resilience through rhythm: An evidence-based social and emotional learning program that enables real change*. <https://holyoake.org.au/drumbeat/>
- Holyoake. (2020b). *Facilitator training*. <https://holyoake.org.au/drumbeat/drumbeat-facilitators/facilitator-training/>
- Holyoake. (2020c). *Life changing: Enabling positive change for individuals, families and communities*. <https://holyoake.org.au/>
- Humphrey, C. (2012). Dilemmas in doing insider researcher in professional education *Qualitative Social Work*, 12(5), 572–586. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325012446006>
- Kelly, B. L. (2015). Using audio documentary to engage young people experiencing homelessness in strengths-based group work. *Social Work with Groups*, 38(1), 68–86. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/01609513.2014.931665>
- Lee, M., & Fortune, A. E. (2013). Do we need more “Doing” activities or “Thinking” activities in the field practicum? *Journal of Social Work Education*, 49(4), 646–660. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2013.812851>
- Lewis, M. L., & King, D. M. (2019). Teaching self-care: The utilization of self-care in social work practicum to prevent compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 29(1), 96–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2018.1482482>

- Lindsay, T., & Orton, S. (2014). *Groupwork practice in social work* (3rd ed.). Learning Matters.
- Litvack, A., Mishna, F., & Bogo, M. (2010). Emotional reactions of students in field education: An exploratory study. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(2), 227–243. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2010.200900007>
- Martin, K., Wood, L., Tasker, J., & Colletsis, C. (2014). *The impact of Holyoake's DRUMBEAT program on prisoner wellbeing in Western Australian prisons*. https://mk0holyoakejouu082t9.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DRUMBEAT-Final-Report_all-colour.pdf
- Miller, J. J. (2020). Building competency in self-care for social work students: A course-based case study. *Social Work Education*, 39(2), 256–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1620722>
- Moore, S. E., Bledsoe, L. K., Perry, A. R., & Robinson, M. A. (2011). Social work students and self care: A model assignment for teaching. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(3), 545–553. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2011.201000004>
- Padgett, D. K. (2012). *Qualitative and mixed methods in public health*. SAGE Publications.
- Papouli, E. (2014). Field education in social work education: Implications for educators and instructors. *Field Educator*, 4(2), 1–16.
- Shanti, C., Gerstenblatt, P., & Frisk, S. (2021). Putting the pieces together: critical service learning and social work education. *Social Work Education*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.1924663>
- Trevithick, P. (2012). *Social work skills and knowledge: A practice handbook* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.
- Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), 384–399. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/h0022100>
- Yap, A. F., Kwan, Y. H., & Ang, S. B. (2017). A systematic review on the effects of active participation in rhythm-centred music making on different aspects of health. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 9, 44–49. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2016.11.011>