Editor's Choice

Supervising International Social Work Students in Australia: The Positionings of Placement Educators

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how placement educators position themselves with regard to supervising international social work students in Australia. Existing research into placement educators' experiences of supervising international students generally adopts a post-positivist perspective which views participants' recounted experiences as representing reality. This paper adopts positioning theory, a constructivist perspective, which views participants' accounts as a means of constructing their identities within an experiential framework. Analysis of 15 interviews with social work placement educators reveals that they position themselves as treating international students equally to domestic students, and being adaptive and supportive to international students' needs. They also position themselves as having time constraints while positioning universities as being responsible for preparing students. Educators' positionings suggest that they see themselves as having a degree of agency in addressing challenges, while simultaneously calling for further institutional support. This has implications for supporting placement educators' professional development in response to an increasing number of international students completing social work placements.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a rapid worldwide increase in the number of students who travel to another country for educational purposes ('international students'). International students now constitute a substantial percentage of student populations in many English-speaking countries. International students account for 21.1% of student populations in the UK, 15.2% in Canada, and 15% in New Zealand (The Institute of International Education [IIE], 2017). In Australia, approximately a quarter of enrolments in tertiary institutions are now international students (Australian Government Department of Education and Training [DET], 2018). This increasing trend is highly evident in social work education (Harrison & Felton, 2013; Zuchowski, Hudson, Bartlett, & Diamandi, 2014). For example, the past 10 years have seen a steady increase of international student intake to the Master of Social Work program at the University of South Australia, which currently accounts for half of the entire student cohort (Diamandi, Hudson, & Zuchowski, 2018).

The rapid increase of international students poses considerable challenges to placement educators in a range of learning environments, particularly in relation to health professions' placements where students complete industry-based credit units as part of their tertiary studies. One of the very few studies focusing on social work placement educators' experiences reports various challenges for educators supervising international students, including assisting students with language and communication development, cultural barriers, and students' lack of local knowledge (Ross, Ta, & Grieve, 2019). These challenges are reflected in a range of other health professions. For example, nursing placement educators face difficulties addressing international students' communication issues (Jackson, 2017; Mantzourani, Courtier, Davies, & Bean, 2015; Melles, 2007) and students' lack of understanding of the host educational system and workplace culture (Fotheringham, Craig, & Tor, 2018; Jackson, 2017; Mantzourani et al., 2015; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004).

Placement educators generally claim that supervising international students involves additional responsibilities and an increased workload (Attrill, Lincoln, & McAllister, 2016; Melles, 2007; Ross et al., 2019, Zuchowski, Cleak, Nickson, & Spencer, 2019). Although placement educators are aware of the importance of adapting their practices to meet international students' needs (Goldingay, 2012; Mantzourani et al., 2015; Nilson, 2011), they sometimes feel underprepared to do so (Goldingay, 2012). They attribute this to a lack of understanding about students' learning styles (Mantzourani et al., 2015) and limited capacity and resources to help students develop language skills (Attrill et al., 2016).

The studies outlined above provide valuable insights into the challenges that international students and placement educators face. They are, however, all based on the assumption that students' and educators' accounts represent the reality of their academic and professional lives, portraying them as passive players reacting to their circumstances. Such a perspective fails to understand students' and educators' active roles in enacting and shaping their academic and professional realities to address the challenges they face. This paper takes an alternative approach by drawing on positioning theory – which is predicated on the assumption that participants' recounting of their experiences is a discursive practice, through which they position themselves and others, and display their agency regarding the social structures in which they are involved (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999).

This assumes that there is not only one reality, but that reality is discursively constructed on an individual basis.

By adopting a positioning perspective to explore placement educators' positioning of themselves and other stakeholders with regard to the education of international students during social work placement, this paper provides an understanding of educators' agency in addressing the challenges involved. Such an understanding can aid in the development of professional training for placement educators of international students in the context of the internationalisation of social work education.

In this paper, the term *placement educator* is used to refer to both task supervisors and social work field educators. Task supervisors are not necessarily qualified social workers. They are responsible for overseeing the daily tasks of social work students on placement but do not assess their abilities to fulfil these tasks. Field educators are qualified social workers who are responsible for assessing the social work competencies of students (AASW, 2020).

Educators' professional roles in relation to the internationalisation of education

The internationalisation of education is broadly defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Underlying this is the idea of educating cosmopolitan citizens to thrive in a cosmopolitan world characterised by increases in international trade, mobility of people, and cultural diversity (Knight, 1997, 2003; Sanderson, 2011). In social work education, internationalisation has been largely discussed under the tenet of integrating internationally focused content in the curriculum to develop essential skills to work with clients from various cultural backgrounds and in various international contexts (Acquaye, 2014; Dominelli & Hackett, 2012; Wehbi, Parada, George, & Lessa, 2016). Internationalisation of social work education should take into consideration students' diverse experiences and needs, rather than only being driven by employer demand (Grace et al., 2013). Recently, social work degrees in Australia have experienced high levels of internationalisation of the student cohort (Ross et al., 2019). Increases in internationalisation (of both content and student cohorts) highlight the need to support educators to develop expert skills in delivering internationalised social work education.

With the increased focus on education internationalisation, educators may be required to reconstruct their professional responsibilities, roles and identities (Sanderson, 2008, 2011; Tran & Nguyen, 2015). Research in counselling and psychology education, for example, reveals that placement educators adopt a modelling role by engaging international students in multicultural discussions (Akkurt, 2016; Lee, 2018; Mori, 2010; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Park & Wood, 2017). In vocational education and training, educators develop their identities as being willing to learn about their students' cultures, and agentive in adapting their teaching approaches to meet students' learning needs (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). However, studies reveal that educators may resist these emerging professional roles. In secondary education, mathematics teachers reject the responsibilities of addressing international students' English language needs as they claim to lack the confidence and skills to do so (Love & Arkoudis, 2006). Similarly, teachers of English as an additional language claim to lack adequate resources to assist students to develop their English for content purposes (Filipi & Keary, 2018).

In health profession placement education, similar claims concerning lack of skills and resources for supervising international students have been reported (Attrill et al., 2016). However, it is overly simplistic to interpret such claims as indicating resistance to accepting the additional roles and responsibilities associated with addressing international students' learning needs. Instead of viewing placement educators' reporting of challenges as an indicator of resistance to their additional roles, this paper explores how educators position themselves and other stakeholders with regard to the education of international students during placement. Understanding their positionings will assist in increasing mutual understanding between educators and other stakeholders and highlight ways to support educators' professional development.

Educators' professional development and identity

From a socio-cultural perspective, the professional development of placement educators involves constructing identities that respond to their changing workplace contexts (Lave & Wenger, 2001; Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Paloniemi, Herranen, & Eteläpelto, 2017). These professional identities are shaped through educators' social interactions and are pertinent to the particular social contexts of their workplace (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010). In the field of international education, educators' perceptions and reflections of their emerging professional roles and identities with respect to their changing workplace landscape play an important role in their professional learning (Sanderson, 2008; Tran & Nguyen, 2015; Viczeko & Wright, 2010). Such awareness of identity development is crucial for meeting students' diverse needs in the context of increasing numbers of international students (Tobin, 2016). Therefore, in order to support educators' professional learning and development, it is necessary to gain an understanding of how they make sense of their emerging roles and construct their professional identities.

While educators' identities have been explored in other fields of education such as secondary education and vocational education (e.g., Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Avraamido, 2016; Brooks, 2016; Tran & Nguyen, 2015), there is a paucity of research into the identities of placement educators in health professions. This is particularly the case for social work placement educators in relation to the internationalisation of the student cohort. This paper responds to this research gap by exploring placement educators' professional roles and identities when educating international students through the lens of positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999).

Positioning theory

Positioning theory was developed within discursive psychology, which takes the view that it is through language or conversation that the social world is constituted and that social experiences are produced and reproduced (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999). According to positioning theorists, conversation has a tri-polar structure consisting of positions, storylines and speech acts (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999). To talk is to perform a speech act, which serves to achieve a certain social purpose (Austin, 1962). Talk includes storytelling that reflects socio-cultural structures and individuals' roles within these structures (Filipi & Keary, 2018). Positionings change constantly throughout a storyline for individuals and in relation to particular socio-cultural structures (Filipi & Keary, 2018).

In comparison to the concept of role, positioning is more dynamic. Role can be seen as a prescriptive set of rights and duties, whereas positioning is a dynamic process through which participants can claim certain rights and duties and ascribe them to others (Filipi & Keary, 2018). Other related concepts to positioning include identity and agency. While positioning can be discontinuous (e.g., when a person adopts multiple and contradictory positions), expression of identity is seen as a display of continuous self with agency (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999). Agency is purposeful social action which interacts with the social contexts in which people live (Tran & Nguyen, 2015). In their social interaction, a participant's multiple positionings are manifested as a coherent and intelligible self who is agentive in taking responsible social actions and pursuing meaningful social aims (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999).

In this paper, educators' agency is defined as educators' intentional actions in the process of making changes and undertaking their role in educating an increasing number of international students on placement. Positioning theory is used as an analytical tool to investigate how the placement educators' agency is discursively constructed as they recount their experiences of supervising international students. In particular, two concepts are used: intentional self-positioning and intentional other-positioning (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Based on the seminal work of Davies and Harré (1990) and Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990), pronominal choice (e.g., I, we or they) will be used as the analytical tool to determine intentional processes of positioning of the self and others.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and data collection

This paper reports on data collected from 15 semi-structured phone interviews with social work placement educators across Australia. The data were collected as part of a larger project, the full details of which are reported elsewhere (Ross et al., 2019; Ross, Ta, & Oliaro, 2020). Educators who completed an online anonymous survey as part of the larger project were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in a phone interview. These educators had all supervised at least one international student on placement and included both task supervisors and field educators. They were given an explanatory statement and gave their consent by electing to be interviewed and signing their name in an online link prior to the interview. Before data collection began, the ethics of the project were approved by MUHREC (The Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee).

All of the 15 educators who agreed to participate in an interview were qualified social workers. Thirteen were female and two male. Three identified as coming from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Participants had supervised social work students for an average of 11.9 years, and international students for an average of 2.9 years. Their fields of practice included youth and aged care, child protection, hospital social work, paediatric emergency services, refugee services, clients with learning difficulties, disability, grief and loss, job seeking clients, and international social services.

The interview questions centred on the educators' views on the benefits and challenges of supervising international students, their perception of their educative roles, and whether

they supervise international students differently from domestic students. The interviews, which lasted 42 minutes on average (ranging from 20–60 minutes), were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis of transcripts drew on both thematic analysis and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis was adopted at a global level to categorise participants' positionings into major themes, while discourse analysis was used to examine the actual language chosen by participants in order to identify the positionings underlying each of their speech acts. Given the focus on how participants do things with words in discourse analysis (Austin, 1962), the analysis presented here relies on direct quotes (as opposed to glossing participants' answers for overall thematic and content understanding).

Throughout the interview process, measures were taken to minimise any display of the interviewer's position regarding the issue in question by avoiding positive or negative framing. This was done by presenting two opposite perspectives and asking interviewees to take a position. For example, one of the questions was worded as: "Some educators say that challenges of supervising international students outweigh its benefits; however, others claim that there are more benefits than challenges. What do you think?" Although negative positionings can be minimised, the interview questions unavoidably involve positioning of some sort (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), and a researcher's positioning via interview questions is a necessary means by which the participants construct their positionings.

Participants' positionings may also have been influenced by the institutional roles of the researchers involved in the project. The researchers were employed by a university and their institutional status was explained to the interviewees. This may have created complexities and dynamicity in the relationship between the researchers and the participants whereby the participants' positionings may have been influenced by the fact that they were speaking to a university representative. However, this is not seen as a factor weakening the objectivity of their answers. Instead, throughout the analysis, it is considered as a factor accounting for the co-construction of their positionings.

FINDINGS

Positioning the supervision of international and domestic students as equal

This section reports on how placement educators perceive their supervisory roles and how these roles change according to whether educators supervise international or domestic students.

The data indicate that educators view their roles as being multifaceted, including assisting students' professional development, teaching the knowledge and skills required for the field of practice, and acting as role models.

When asked if their roles varied according to whether they are supervising international or domestic students, two thirds of participants claim this is not the case as shown in the following representative quote: "*No*, I don't think so. *No*, I can't see why that would be *any* different" (Interviewee 14). In this quote, the educator negates any differences in her supervisory roles between two international and domestic student cohorts. Here, the repetition of the negation token *no* is used as a device for emphasis (Norrick, 1987). In addition, she challenges the assumption that her supervisory roles would differ depending

on whether the students were international or domestic. These discursive devices denote the educator's position that there is no differentiation between supervising international and domestic students.

The five participants who claim to supervise differently emphasise that their approach varies depending on the individual student, thereby also positioning themselves as not discriminating between domestic and international students. This is exemplified in the following quote:

> I think my approach will change for the individual student. It's not so much that I have one approach for local students and one approach for international students, it's very much the individual student and what they need. (Interviewee 3)

In the above quote, the educator explicitly claims that her approach to supervision changes according to the individual student's needs. Similarly, the educator in the following quote claims that she sees students as individuals rather than as belonging to two distinctive groups. However, she also indicates that she used to treat international students as different to domestic students. This shows her development from a differentiative approach to an inclusive approach, where students' individual needs are the focus of her educational method.

> I used to be more mindful when I was supervising international students versus a local student. But not these days. […] But in terms of my approach, or whether I supervise them differently, I wouldn't say that, because maybe perhaps my supervision style is quite fluid and flexible. I really work with the person. So – I see the person as a person. I don't necessarily see them as students – an international student or local students. I'll see them – what they need […] (Interviewee 1)

By focusing on whether educators supervise international and domestic students differently, the interview question itself positions international students as a different category from domestic students. Although not intended to invoke discrimination, the categorising of students in the question may have had such an effect. In response to the possible invocation of discrimination, the educators re-position international students as not being treated differently from domestic students. This may signal educators' sensitivity to the discourse which claims that international students experience discrimination and prejudice (e.g., Harrison & Felton, 2013; Marginson, 2012; Taylor, Craft, Murray, & Rowley, 2000) and the discourse which views international students as victims of exploitation (e.g., Chowdhurry & Le, 2014; Klafter, 2018). However, as DiAngelo (2018) argued, over-sensitivity to racism may prevent the "white" from talking openly about cultural diversity. In order to tackle a racist system, DiAngelo recommends that white people address cultural diversity issues rather than avoid them. In light of DiAngelo's (2018) insights, it would be necessary to investigate whether refusing to talk about the differences between international and domestic students might hinder placement educators' ability to provide effective support to international students. Such an investigation is, however, outside of the scope of this research.

Positioning international students as requiring additional support

In response to whether they supervise international students differently to domestic students, all 15 educators identify one common aspect of difference in their supervision: namely, that it requires more time and effort to supervise international students. Educators noted that additional time and effort are required to support international students, as compared to their domestic counterparts, in the following areas: general English language skills, social work specific communication skills (e.g., writing case notes, implementing assessments, talking to clients about emotions), knowledge of Australian systems (e.g., the welfare system), and cultural barriers that hinder students from establishing rapport with colleagues and clients. As to the *amount* of support, educators all indicate that supervising international students requires "far more supportive work", and "an awful lot of additional support", as illustrated in the following quotes:

> I think far more supportive, so there was far more supportive work that needed to be done, and educative work, than I would do for just an Australian social work student. (Interviewee 8)

> I feel like international students actually require an awful lot of additional support. (Interviewee 10)

The above quotes reveal that placement educators generally position international students as requiring additional support. This positioning is not an end in itself but works together with the other positioning which calls for further support from universities. However, before discussing positionings in relation to universities, the following section focuses on how placement educators position themselves in the role of support giver.

Positioning placement educators as supportive and sensitive to international student needs

Analysis reveals that educators generally position themselves as being supportive to international students' needs. For example, the educator in the following quote claims that she is willing and able to give support to students in relation to language issues.

> I think maybe a barrier because of the language as well. So I'm generally quite helpful and give students a lot of feedback and send them for extra help. […] I don't mind giving them a lot more structure and lot more feedback and a lot more guidance […] (Interviewee 6)

It is worth noting, however, that not all supervisors position themselves as both helpful and willing to provide additional support to international students. Some position themselves as being willing, but also state they are unable to provide international students with support due to time constraints. Others describe their involvement in supporting international students to develop their communication skills, but also position themselves as not willing to take on international students in the future. Overall, the educators position themselves as being supportive to international students to varying extents.

A third of the educators position themselves as adopting culturally sensitive approaches. These approaches involve being aware of the culturally specific ways in which international students think and behave in order to assist them to become successful learners in a Western culture. For example, the following educator explains how his cultural awareness assists students to demonstrate their critical thinking:

> For some students, I feel like their experience of the course was that they just wanted to be told what to do, which was dumbing them down. But it wasn't their natural ability; their natural ability is to have a critical, curious mind, but they were in a Western course, they didn't understand the absorption method and the curious method within our Western education system. I think there's a different way of thinking, and there seems to be an Asian way of thinking and a Western way of thinking. So I needed to give more directives and provide more parameters, but once I did that their actual critical thinking was sound […]. (Interviewee 8)

The above quote represents a position in which the placement educator's awareness of the differences in the so-called Western and Asian ways of thinking eventually helped him to find an appropriate approach to assist his students' development of critical thinking. A different educator creates a similar position in which she explains her awareness of cultural differences in regard to students' reluctance to speak up. She positions her approach to supervising international students as encouraging them to ask questions and take the initiative in their learning.

> I think sometimes some of the students feel that if they ask questions that may be disrespectful or maybe a bit rude to be so blunt. So I encourage them [...] to ask questions and try and reassure them that that actually is considered to be, actually in Australia to be a sign of being a very motivated learner and that that you're a good student if you ask questions. (Interviewee 6)

One of the educators describes her approach of gaining knowledge of her students' cultural backgrounds in order to provide culturally tailored support:

> With an international student I normally will spend a little bit more time to get to know the person, the student's story, and their cultural upbringing. […] So if I have got a little bit more information, understanding of the person's cultural background, then I will be able to support them differently […] (Interviewee 1)

In general, educators position themselves as being culturally aware, particularly regarding their culturally adaptive approaches and their engagement in intercultural discussions. This positioning aligns with prevalent discourses in psychology placement supervision, where placement educators are recommended to develop cultural sensitivity to international students' needs, and engage in discussing multicultural issues (Akkurt, 2016; Lee, 2018; Mori, 2010; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Park & Wood, 2017).

When positioning themselves as supportive and culturally sensitive, educators persistently use the pronoun *I* plus verbs of perception (e.g., *I think, I saw, I would say,* and *I don't*

mind). The use of *I* suggests educators' sense of agency in dealing with the requirements of their professional roles regarding the supervision of international students (e.g., their ability to implement culturally sensitive practices). This contrasts directly with the use of the generic pronoun *we* to denote their institutional positioning, which is analysed further in the following section.

Positioning placement educators as constrained by workplace contexts

This section reports on the analysis of responses to the question of how participants perceive the benefits and challenges of supervising international students. One common theme (6 of 15) to emerge from these responses is the issue of time limitations. For instance, one educator states that social workers and most staff in her workplace are busy people who do not have time to assist students:

> I think, look, to be honest, we're – most social workers – and most hospital allied health staff are very busy. We don't always have the time allocated to work with students to get them up to scratch […]. (Interviewee 12)

Similarly, another educator states she does not have time to fulfil her responsibilities of educating international students to write professional documents during placement:

> We don't have the time to be correcting things and a lot of our documents go out to somewhere else or to someone else and we don't have the time to be correcting if the grammar is not right or the capital letters are missing or whatever. So and for this particular student that was challenging and took him a lot of time. […] Because I think our experience with this gentleman will be that no one will want to pick up an international student and that's a real shame […]. (Interviewee 11)

As indicated in the above quote, after Interviewee 11's first experience of educating an international student, her workplace was not willing to take on future international students. Likewise, Interviewee 1, who has previously worked with 10 international students and claims to enjoy working with them, acknowledges that her ability to support international students is limited in terms of time and resources.

> We can only provide very limited support. We can try our best, but we also need to make sure the work is still going. So from an agency's point of view, sometimes we do have that limitation around the resources and the time that we can give to students. (Interviewee 1)

These quotes illustrate how educators switch from using the personal pronoun *I* to using a generic pronoun *we* when making claims about time limitations, making generalisations (e.g., *most* social workers), and mentioning their workplace's perspective. While *I* indexes the speaker as a single entity, *we* indexes the speaker as a member of a social unit (Davies & Harré, 1990; Hydén & Nilsson, 2015; Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990). This shift from *I* to *we* indicates a shift from personal positioning to professional workplace positioning. Their use of *we* indicates a belief that support for international students also entails institutional involvement, particularly in terms of institutional responsibilities in providing time relief.

It is important to note that the interview questions are unlikely to have contributed to the participants' choice of pronouns. For example, one of the questions asked was "What should be done in terms of placement preparation for international students?" The wording indicates a focus on how the challenges they described should be addressed, and did not make mention of their workplace, suggesting that the shift of positioning in the educators' responses is voluntary and intentional. Specifically, the educators position themselves as a member of an institution and frame the challenges of supporting international students as institutional rather than personal. Through this framing, educators avoid weakening their personal capabilities or agency in working with international students.

Positioning universities as being accountable for screening and preparing students

A third of the participants position universities as responsible for screening and preparing international students prior to commencing placement. For instance, one educator positions her workplace as being well equipped to cater for international students' needs, and she also positions the university as responsible for student screening to ensure they have adequate language competence before placement:

> I think for our workplace here, I'd have to say that we're already quite well equipped to look after international students. I'm not quite sure if there's anything in particular for international students that we need to improve upon. Again, I think it's probably more things need to be done on a level before they get to us, to try and make it easier. So, like I said, making sure that they are aware of, and they've got good communication skills, they know that they're in a degree where you have to talk to people, and you have to work with people's feelings. (Interviewee 13)

The following quote provides a further example in which placement educators position universities as being responsible for preparing students for placement. As in the previous quote, this educator positions herself as not being able to educate to her full abilities due to the university not taking a position of responsibility in adequately preparing students for placement.

> I think the university could take a lead role in preparing the students more. You know, international students to placement. So the supervisors are not caught in very basic skills. That takes more time. I think they could deliver some specific course preparation for supervising international students. (Interviewee 7)

The use of pronouns in the above quotes reveals a contrast between educators' perceptions of time constraints and challenges in supporting international students, and their positionings of universities' responsibilities for preparing international students prior to placement. The third-person pronoun *they* is used to refer to the university, while the inclusive pronoun *we* (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990) is used to refer to their role at social work agencies. By using *we*, they include themselves in the institutional time constraint. By contrast, with the use of *they*, educators distance themselves from the responsibility of preparing students for placement.

The shifts between an agentive *I* (who is supportive and culturally sensitive), an inclusive but agency-focused *we* (who have time constraints), and *they* (who should take greater responsibility) links directly to the educators' positioning and delineation of responsibility. This substantiates placement educators' calls for further institutional support, particularly from universities. As mentioned previously, participants are aware of the researchers' institutional roles (i.e., international student support staff from a university) and the purpose of the research (i.e., development of professional learning support for placement educators of international students). Arguably, their positioning may be seen as a way to make their voices heard and invite universities to take greater responsibility in overcoming challenges faced by educators and students during placement.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper illustrates the significance of using positioning theory to gain an understanding of placement educators' interpretations of their experiences supervising international students on placement. Examining their positionings provides in-depth understanding of their sense of agency in addressing the challenges involved in educating international students. This may, in turn, inform approaches to support their professional learning (Tran & Nguyen, 2015; Tran & Pasura, 2018).

The analysis presented here shows that placement educators position international students as having both additional support needs and equal access to educational opportunities. These findings move beyond merely interpreting placement educators' claims about challenges as resistance to their roles of educating international students (Filipi & Keary, 2018; Love & Arkoudis, 2006) or as associated with discrimination and prejudice against international students (Harrison & Felton, 2013; Marginson, 2012; Taylor et al., 2000). The placement educators in this study largely avoid negative interpretations of their claims regarding challenges by confirming a clear self-positioning in providing the same educational approach for treating international and domestic students. They also position themselves as maintaining a supportive attitude to international students and being sensitive to cultural differences, despite extraneous constraints of time and international students' lack of additional preparation. This positioning aligns with calls for educators to display cultural sensitivity and adapt their educational approaches (Akkurt, 2016; Lee, 2018; Mori, 2010; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004; Park & Wood, 2017; Tran & Nguyen, 2015). Overall, placement educators position themselves as having a sense of agency in addressing professional challenges and developing their capabilities to cater to international students' needs.

Despite their sense of agency and capability in educating international students, the placement educators perceive that time constraints restrict them from adequately addressing international students' additional needs. These constraints are considered an institutional, rather than a personal, matter. Placement educators position themselves as being constrained by their institutional agency-based roles as social workers who are expected to fulfil other competing institutional responsibilities. This, in turn, leads directly to their positioning of universities as not adequately fulfilling their responsibility for preparing and supporting international students on placement (see also Diamandi, Hudson, & Zuchowski, 2018).

By positioning universities, international students, and themselves in particular ways, placement educators project their sense of agency, and perception of capabilities while simultaneously calling for further fulfilment of responsibilities from universities (see also Ross et al., 2020).

This analysis indicates that positioning theory can be used as a powerful means of understanding participants' identities. In this study, the placement educators' co-existent multiple identities include being a social worker (who has time constraints), an educator (who trains students to become social workers), and a support-giver (who provides additional support to international students). In their accounts of their experiences, these multiple identities are manifested as a coherent and intelligible self who is agentive in taking responsible social actions and pursuing meaningful educational aims (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999).

Placement educators' sense of agency and capability should be taken into account in order to support their professional development in relation to supervising international students. They should be viewed as agentive social actors capable of making changes in their practice to meet the needs of international students. Viewing them as passive and subject to institutional changes may impede our understanding of the complexity of their professional experiences. This, in turn, might present challenges in providing support for placement educators in performing their professional responsibilities. Therefore, universities should approach their support or professional development programs with consideration of placement educators' sense of agency. However, the results of this paper focus on the positionings only of placement educators. The research does not include the positionings of a range of other stakeholders in the education of international social work students, many of whom are mentioned by the placement educators. Further research into the positionings of academic support staff, educators and leaders of social work education programs in regard to international student placements is highly recommended, as it will assist in understanding how stakeholders position themselves in relation to each other. This can lead to a holistic approach to the support not only of placement educators, but all stakeholders with an interest in the successful education of an international social work cohort in Australia.

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