

“Our recording regime is forever changing ... so I think we’re forever learning. The value of this type of research has implications for the way I design my own recording to make it clearer, so this research in itself has had an impact on how we record.”

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Find out more about this project and the Practice-based Professional Learning CETL at our web site:

www.open.ac.uk/pbpl/

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Getting it right/ write

Exploring professional writing in
Social Work

Lucy Rai and Theresa Lillis



Practice-based Professional Learning
Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Understanding the link between academic and professional writing.

How can professional training enable social work graduates to be prepared for writing in the workplace?

Writing under pressure

Writing represents a significant aspect of professional social work practice. "Getting it right (write)" often under pressure is a major challenge faced by professional social workers. Through the collection of data, analysis and dissemination processes, this project draws together the worlds of the academy and the workplace.

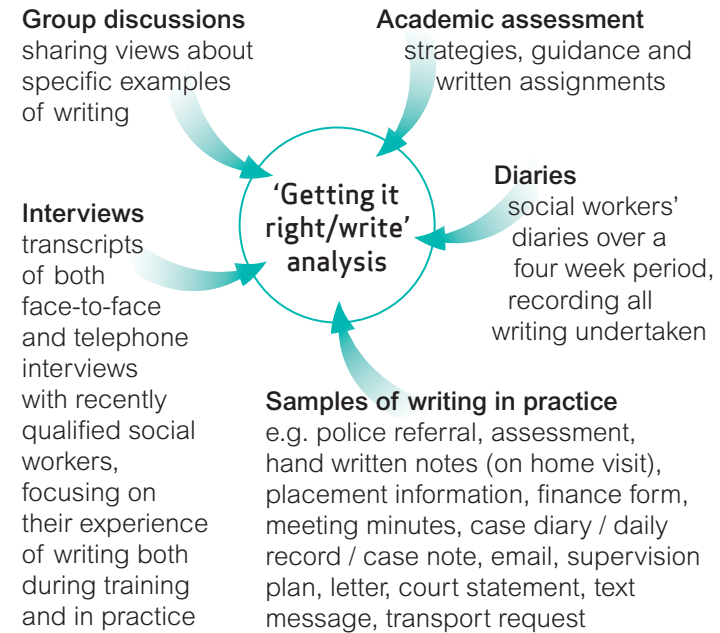
Methodology

We invited five recently qualified childcare social workers to become co-researchers in the collection and analysis of practice-based data: samples of writing in

practice over a four week period; diaries, noting down all writing undertaken; discussions; individual interviews. We also scrutinised assessment strategies, assessment guidance and written assignments undertaken by social work students at The Open University.

"I don't think there is any preparation for the chaotic nature of our writing ... you just don't have the time and then your recording comes down to a 'need to know'."

"... it could be a shock for someone newly in the field for the first time to experience how much is involved and how much multi-tasking is involved in terms of the types of recording you're involved in."



Key Themes

Complexity – a very wide variety of writing tasks which are complex and have to be completed in a 'disjointed' way over extended periods of time.

Writing demands – insufficient attention is given to professional writing demands during professional training.

Time – a considerable amount of time is spent writing, some practitioners reporting 70-90% of work time.

Technologies – IT systems are both beneficial and problematic.

Greater clarity is needed about the function of diverse forms of professional writing, both as recording and supporting direct practice. Line managers and supervisors have a key role to play in the development of social workers' effective writing practice.

"... the true scale of multi-tasking and being involved in so many cases in one day, I think, is very apparent from the records of recordings through the day. ... Some days it's quite chaotic."