

Challenges for Social Work Training: Field Professionals' Experiences in Internship Supervision to the south of Chile

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Abstract

The article analyzes the experience of field professionals supervising internships of Social Work students at the Catholic University of Chile. Based on a Teaching Innovation Project (PID) consisting of a training program on supervision in Social Work, it delved into a) the central main tensions facing Social Work in Chile were discussed in detail, b) the strengths and weaknesses of professional vocational training from the experience of institutional supervision, and c) the role of supervision and the professional in charge of this process. Using qualitative methodology, the participants' course narratives report of the participants in the course were transcribed, categorized, and interpreted using qualitative content analysis technique. The results highlight show that professionals' concerns are concerned about the effects of neoliberalism on public policies, the practice of the profession, and professional training, as well as the need to recognize contexts of inequality and social exclusion by valuing sociocultural diversity in which the profession develops its task. Among the strengths of vocational training, proactivity and willingness are mentioned, while among the weaknesses are difficulties in theoretical argumentation, critical analysis and the use of information technologies. The commitment to the supervision process stands out, as Regarding supervision, they conceive it as a space for "reflective reflexive discussion", based on accompaniment, feedback, and critical reflection on reality, to generate pertinent action proposals. This aligns with the literature regarding the internship supervisor as a "practical educator".

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Keywords: Social Work; Professional training; Internship supervision; Field professionals.



Desafíos para la formación en Trabajo Social: la experiencia de profesionales de campo en la supervisión de prácticas profesionales al sur de Chile

Resumen

El artículo analiza la experiencia de profesionales de campo que supervisan prácticas de estudiantes de Trabajo Social, en la Universidad Católica de Chile. A partir de un Proyecto de Innovación Docente (PID) consistente en un programa de formación sobre supervisión en Trabajo Social, se profundizó acerca de a) las principales tensiones que enfrenta el Trabajo Social en Chile; b) las fortalezas y debilidades de la formación profesional; y c) el papel de la supervisión y de los supervisores. A través de una metodología cualitativa, se transcribieron los relatos de los y las participantes del curso, y luego se categorizó e interpretó la información a través de la técnica de análisis de contenido cualitativo. En los resultados se constata la preocupación de los y las profesionales por los efectos del neoliberalismo en las políticas públicas, el ejercicio de la profesión y la formación profesional, así como, la necesidad de reconocer los contextos de desigualdad y exclusión social en los que se desarrolla la profesión. Dentro de las fortalezas de la formación profesional señalan la proactividad y la disposición, y entre las debilidades, las dificultades en torno a la argumentación teórica, el análisis crítico y el manejo de tecnologías de la información. En cuanto a la supervisión, la conciben como un espacio de “discusión reflexiva”, basado en el acompañamiento, la retroalimentación y la reflexión crítica de la realidad, para generar propuestas de acción pertinentes, lo que coincide con lo referido en la literatura respecto a los supervisores de práctica como educadores prácticos.

Palabras clave: Trabajo Social; Formación profesional; Supervisión de prácticas; Profesionales de campo.

Summary: 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Findings, 3.1 Main tensions contemporary Social Work faces in Chile, 3.2. Strengths and weaknesses of professional training experience in supervision, 3.3 The Role of Supervision and the Field Professional Supervising Practices, 4. Conclusions, 5. Bibliographic references.



1. Introduction

The Learning Communities are collegiate instances promoted by the Catholic University of Temuco to encourage reflection and research in teaching, and they are made up of teachers, student assistants, and pedagogical advisors interested in reflecting on the formative processes of students. In the Social Work career at this University, a team made up of four teachers, a pedagogical advisor of the General Directorate of Teaching, and a student as an assistant in 2018 decided to form a Learning Community with the aim of reflecting and systematizing experiences around the practical training of students of the career.

Currently, there are different perspectives regarding Social Work in Chile, some of a conservative nature, which associate it with a somewhat welfare performance, resource management, and uncritical execution of programs and public policies, and others that appeal to the ethical and socio-political commitment of the profession, aimed at denouncing inequalities and injustices seeking to transform these conditions of oppression. From this last perspective, the training process for a social work career at the University has been designed. However, in professional internships, students often face contradictory visions, both from the institutions operating as practice centers and the field professionals accompanying and supervising their performance, which strains the training process. Based on these reflections and questions, the proposal for the design and implementation of a course arises, aimed at field professionals - who are or have carried out processes of supervision of practice in Social Work - called Supervision of Practices in Social Work Course, taught in *e-learning mode*, during the year 2022. This course, designed as an instance of dialogue and reflection with field professionals, allowed them to collect their visions and experiences around three questions: What are the central tensions contemporary social workers in Chile face? What are the main strengths and weaknesses of vocational training from the experience of institutional supervision? Finally, how do those who carry out this work and their role in it conceive the supervision of practices? In this way, the reports of professionals participating in the course were studied to learn about their experiences around the challenges they face in the supervision of professional practices of social work students. The *e-learning modality* made it possible to record the discussions developed in each module in the synchronous classes and the activities carried out at asynchronous times. These records were transcribed and analyzed based on the content analysis technique, which will be discussed later using the theoretical-conceptual background collected from the literature review. The details of the bibliographic review are developed later in this document.

The article is organized into four sections. The first one presents the literature's background regarding the relevance of practical training and field supervision and the primary disciplinary discussions around social work, vocational training, and exercise in the labor field. The second section deepened the methodology of the course and the analysis of the information collected. In the third section, the reports provided by the field professionals are analyzed and discussed within the framework of their experience in the accompaniment of the students' training



processes and their vision concerning the profession's challenges. Finally, in the fourth section, the conclusions regarding the vision of field professionals who supervise professional practices, the central tensions faced by social work, the strengths and weaknesses of vocational training, and the role of supervision and the field professional supervising practices are presented.

Background

Practical training is an educational approach that is becoming increasingly relevant for higher education institutions, given the constant challenges that the context of globalization imposes on them. However, in Chile, the difficulties that arise in the framework of professional practices have been scarcely addressed in the professional training of disciplines of the social sciences in general and in Social Work in particular (Sanhueza-Díaz *et al.*, 2022). International studies indicate that, compared to other careers, the early internship space in Social Work is where students learn to integrate and evaluate professional knowledge and competencies, as well as to make pertinent decisions within the framework of professional performance since students are urged to think and act as a social worker would (Beesley, 2023; Mendonça *et al.*, 2023; Miehl *et al.*, 2013; Rama-Vitale, 2011; Roulston *et al.*, 2021). The solidity of training processes in Social Work makes a great difference in the quality of social programs and society's general well-being. In order to train better-prepared social workers, commitment from organizations is necessary, and they act as spaces of practice (Bogo, 2015). In this regard, some studies confirm the benefits of adequate supervision for social work, which are carried out to accompany new professionals, as well as the supervision of undergraduate and graduate students, especially in increasingly interdisciplinary spaces. It is stated that the quality of supervision is key and that to the extent that it is neglected, it will damage the ability to maintain the standards that have characterized this profession (Sweifach, 2019). In this regard, the literature on supervision of social work students highlights the importance of reflective discussion in developing students' knowledge and skills. Reflective discussion requires the participation of both those who supervise and those who are supervised since it is based on the collaborative exploration of ideas to develop reflective and critical practice in students (Brodie & Williams, 2013; Rawles, 2020; Wilson & Flanagan, 2019). In this sense, the role of the supervisor, understood as that of a practical educator, is fundamental since, through his experience and "practical knowledge," he validates the ideas of the students and broadens their thinking by challenging their reasoning (Rawles, 2020), while positive reinforcement and constructive feedback enhance reflective discussion (Litvack *et al.*, 2010; Miehl *et al.*, 2013; Wilson y Flanagan, 2019). Some research on the relationship between professionals supervising social work practices and students in practice refers that the firsts see themselves as motivators and reflective partners to facilitate the development of the students through the exploration of ideas, while the students conceive supervision as an opportunity to obtain feedback and support, and to develop their knowledge and skills through reflective discussions. (Ketner *et al.*, 2017). Latin American authors agree on the relevance of reflection in practice, referring to the reflective and co-construction dimensions in both intervention and research processes (Parola, 2020). In them, the subjectivities of the social workers, researchers,

and the subjects are at stake (Ortega, 2015; Shaw y Holland, 2014) within the framework of the dialogic construction of narratives both in the processes of intervention and in the production of knowledge (Rubilar-Donoso, 2015). On the other hand, in the supervision framework, it has been identified that reflective discussion is strengthened when the supervisor is open to dialogue and challenges his or her theoretical-methodological certainties (Litvack *et al.*, 2010) in a collaborative relationship that promotes the appreciation of different perspectives.

In Latin America, the professional action of Social Work is carried out in a scenario of power relations, where there is not always coherence between political discourses, allocation of resources, and professional prestige, which implies that on many occasions, there is more discursive than effective political support, limited material resources, and little social prestige—assigned to their professional work (Zúñiga, 1996). Similarly, as Martínez-Sierra (2016) points out, the delimitation of tasks and roles performed by social workers is influenced by their validation and other professionals and managers of the organizations to which they belong. In this context, field professionals who supervise professional practices experience these tensions in their daily lives. Their experience is key to strengthening the professional training of future social workers, as it is hoped that they will be able to integrate the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological discussions generated in the classroom, which are concretely played out in the field of professional action.

In Chile, from a structural perspective, Vivero-Arriagada (2022) argues that higher education in general, and training in Social Work in particular, has been developed in a context of neoliberal policies that have implied the dismantling of public education, and the transformation of education into a commodity. In this context, it warns of the significant increase in the offer of training programs, going from eleven schools in the 70's to almost two hundred vocational training programs by 2020 (Vivero-Arriagada, 2022). This brings a conception of intervention and professional practice as a task based on instrumental, hegemonic, uncritical, and scarcely reflective rationality focused on applying technocratic procedures (Sanhueza-Díaz *et al.*, 2022). In this regard, Brown (2015) refers to the so-called “neoliberal reason”, that is, a way of thinking that determines not only the economy but also the way of organizing life and social relations as a whole, that is, a way of “being” and “being” in the world, of which we are scarcely aware. This new rationality installs a process known as the “commodification of life” (Borón, 2000; Larraín, 2005), which promotes a gradual displacement of the State as the guarantor of substantive rights, giving way to the market in the provision of services for those who can pay for them. For those who are left out of the market, that is, the excluded, the State provides scarce resources that must be managed, primarily by social workers, who, in addition, operate within the framework of State programs directed by chiefdoms that are driven by a strong political-partisan interest, an instrumental and clientelistic logic, aimed at obtaining votes and perpetuating themselves in power. The professional training of social workers in the space of practice implies the development of an ethical-political and pedagogical project that arises from the confrontation of various actors, which complicates and enriches the process of practice and,

in addition, supposes multiple options, political and technical, a conception of the University, of how it is linked to society, the way of understanding science and the production of knowledge, among other aspects (Ludi, 2014). Different theorists of Critical Social Work have already warned about this, as the profession is played in socio-historical conditions characterized by spaces of contradiction of interests, on the one hand, those imposed by the dominant ideology, expressed in the institutionality of the State and the political class of the government of the day, and on the other, the interests of the subordinate classes. Through the demands of the different actors, expressed in various social movements (Carballeda, 2006; Iamamoto, 1992). In this regard, Cárcamo *et al.* (2022) points out that:

The professional practices carried out by students are fundamentally organized according to institutional requirements and interests and not under the demands, needs, and struggles raised by the various social movements, particularly in the last decade. (p. 251)

In Chile, no certification process accredits field professionals for the supervision of internships. On the contrary, the dismantling of public education and the disproportionate increase in higher education institutions that teach the Social Work career has generated that the availability of practice spaces depends on the agreements that the universities established themselves, putting the different houses of study in competition for quality practice spaces for their students.

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2. Methodology

This qualitative study considered both verbal and written reports from professionals who participated in the *Supervision of Social Work Practices* course based on their interventions in synchronous classes and asynchronous activities; that is, it was a non-probabilistic sample, convenience (Hernández-Sampieri *et al.*, 2010; Otzen & Manterola, 2017), composed of a total of 16 professionals, from different disciplines: Psychology (n=1), Social work (n=12), Social Planning (n=1), Pedagogy (n=1) and Engineering (n=1). Through an experiential methodology and collaborative work, training activities were carried out based on reflection and discussion about the main tensions faced by contemporary Social Work in Chile, the strengths and weaknesses of vocational training from the experience of institutional supervision, and the role of supervision and the supervisory professional. The course was taught in e-learning mode, at a distance with lectures, via the MOOC platform. It was designed based on the flipped classroom methodology¹.

(Bergmann & Sams, 2012). The classes were taught between September 2023 and January 2024, with 50 chronological hours distributed over 12 weeks. The synchronous classes were held

¹ Flipped classroom is a methodological strategy in which traditional classroom teaching is carried out outside the classroom, and face-to-face time is used to develop meaningful learning activities and promote collaboration among the students themselves (Turan & Akdag-Cimen, 2020).

on Fridays through the Google Meet platform from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The course had four modules based on the following distribution:

- Module 0: Introductory for *e-learning* training in the University's continuing education programs (this module is part of all continuing education programs), lasting 6 hours, distributed in 2 synchronous and four asynchronous.
- Module 1: Theoretical-conceptual aspects of Social Work, with 12 hours, four synchronous and eight asynchronous.
- Module 2: Professional training in Social Work, with 12 hours of duration, four synchronous and eight asynchronous.
- Module 3: The supervision of internships in Social Work, with 20 hours of duration, eight synchronous and 12 asynchronous.

During the development of the course, the importance of the autonomous work of the participants prior to the synchronous meeting and the active work based on dialogic and participatory exchange during the synchronous meetings is highlighted, where moments of expository classes were combined with group work, case analysis, review of audiovisual material, among others. Both verbal and written discourses on the experiences of field professionals collected in these activities were the input for the development of this work.

The information collected was categorized and interpreted through the qualitative content analysis technique (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). The developed stages were open, axial, and selective coding, considering previous categories based on the reviewed literature and emerging categories that appeared during the analysis. Methodologically, the following steps were developed: verbatim transcription of the reports of the professionals participating in the course; selection and segmentation of written texts based on passages relevant to the objectives set; identification of the manifest codes present in the participants' stories; identification of significant semantic categories in the texts analyzed; grouping of the categories by type, and analysis of the categories obtained (Navarro y Díaz, 1995; Piñuel-Raigada, 2002).

3. Findings

3.1 Main tensions that contemporary Social Work faces in Chile

Since the mid-1970s, Chile assumed neoliberalism as an economic system and an ideological substrate in its modernizing project (Moulian, 2009; Rojo, 2010; Vivero-Arriagada, 2017). This economic and social system significantly affects the context in which Social Work professionals work. This is evidenced by what was pointed out by one of the participants:

Neoliberal logic strongly impacts social policies [...] various proposals, original ones, many times they are invisible. (SI 5, M, Social Worker, 59 years old)

The above opinion coincides with another supervisor, who points out that:



The State has been reducing and applying neoliberal policies that restrict its systematic social action much more through public policies and increasingly leave certain social solutions on the market. (SI 8, H, Planner 48 years old).

This is consistent with what has been pointed out by Latin American authors concerning the tensions faced by Social Work in the context of the prevailing “neoliberal reason” (Brown, 2015) and the subsequent process of commodification of life (Borón, 2000; Larraín, 2005), since the State leaves in the hands of the market, the care and provision of services and even rights, which are accessed as long as there are the resources to do so, increasing at every step the situations of injustice, inequality and social exclusion that characterize the country in particular and Latin America in general.

Against this backdrop, the importance of critical reflection in the framework of professional practices is highlighted. These are spaces where various interests confront each other that often contradict each other, which implies that Social Work assumes an ethical-political project that involves multiple options, political and technical, as well as a conception of the social relations in which the actors with whom our profession works are immersed, which, within the framework of neoliberal reasoning, tend to be characterized by conditions of oppression and social exclusion. One of the main challenges facing the profession in the Latin American context refers to the current scenario of contradictions between the discourse of social justice and the perpetuation of structural conditions of inequality on the part of the States by promoting the self-management of the precariousness of low-income families, within the framework of a neoliberal social order legitimized by public policies (Ovalle-Parra & Amador-Baquiro, 2023), as one of the supervisors reports:

It is our reality in America regarding the intervention of the State; it is not a guarantor of social rights, as we expect it [...] its role is instead of assistance. (SI 6, M, Social Worker, 40 years old)

Thus, this assistance from the State also permeates professional work. In this regard, one of the supervisors, who is not from the discipline, refers to his concern about the student questioning reality, but mainly in the technical aspect, about the instruments that are used:

This professional with theoretical tools can or rather has the ethical duty to question reality and the instrument. How necessary are instruments that have to do with an appropriate reading of what is to be achieved or collected, [...] and that it does not mean invading people's space. (SI 8, H, Planner, 48 years old)

Faced with this scenario of injustice and structural inequality, those who supervise professional practices warn of the importance of considering the situation experienced by

indigenous peoples, notably the Mapuche people, in training and professional practice. This is evidenced by what was indicated by one of the participants:

This rethinking of Social Work in Latin America is fundamental. Since we began to recognize our beginnings, what is happening now with the Indigenous peoples here in our region (Araucanía region) with the issue of the Mapuche conflict? (SI 1, M, Social Assistant, 35 years old)

In this context, as it is referred to by Cárcamo *et al.* (2022), it is essential to analyze the links built by the different institutions in the territories. To know and recognize the practices of resistance that the local teams are developing from the institutions to confront hegemonic practices that make invisible different ways of life present in local spaces. Not all professionals manage to maintain this critical and ethical character, as a young professional refers:

The social worker or colleagues are called to represent minority groups or the most vulnerable ones [...], but we do not always come across 'those' kinds of colleagues. [...] Sometimes, we come across colleagues who are very attached to the structure and the system and who question very little. (SI 7, M, Social Worker, 30 years old)

In this way, the professional's narration confirms what Latin American authors (Carballada, 2006; Yamamoto, 1992) have pointed out regarding the fact that the scenario in which the profession and the internships have been developed is characterized by the presence of contradictions and tensions between hegemonic interests of the ruling class expressed in the institutionality of the State and the demands and needs of the social actors.

3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of professional training in the experience of field supervision

From the narration provided by field supervisors, the main strengths emerge: proactivity and willingness. However, they also refer to weaker aspects: the theoretical argumentation, the critical analysis, the use of information technologies, and the lack of creativity and insecurity. This is how it is stated by one of the supervisors:

To me, one of the things that has been most difficult with them (interns) is what refers to theoretical training [...]. It has been a very disparate situation, especially when they have to substantiate their methodological bets [...] The only thing that fixes this is 'reading, reading, reading,' which is a generational issue, I would say, not only of Social Work but also of its aversion to longer texts. (SI 10, M, Social Assistant 50 years old)

This allows us to show that it is difficult for students to coherently express the theoretical elements taught to them in their years of academic training and to link them in a pertinent way with the characteristics and needs of the practice context. It is possible to find practical

experiences that are satisfactory from the execution but that are not reflected in the documents prepared, which tend to describe the experiences relegating reflection or critical analysis to the background, such as the following case:

I see [...] how we get caught up in protocols and regulations within institutions or within public policy. Then, very proactive students arrive, eager to do things and very willing to do what we tell them, but it lacks the analysis of reality. [...] I feel that there is a lack of harmony and reflexivity regarding reality. (SI 5, M, Social Worker, 59 years old).

On the other hand, they notice certain shortcomings in using digital tools and in a rationality that allows them to manage their time correctly. Regarding training and the use of digital resources, they point out on the one hand that:

Students have had unlimited access to social networks in this pandemic [...], but they are not so mature enough to manage their time well [...], and they do not have the maturity to train in Excel or take courses that do not happen. (SI 1, M, Social Assistant, 35 años)

On the other hand, "As for the use of technologies [...] that of digital natives, in reality, they fall short [...] because they are not able to handle several things [...]. (SI 9, M, Psychologist, 26 years old)

In this way, students use information technologies more to use and manage social networks than to use tools that improve professional performance. On the other hand, references are made to the difficulties students face in making creative proposals in the situations they face in the internships.

They handle information, but how they manage it and how they express it is very difficult for them to relate theory to practice and systematize processes. They show difficulty in criticizing and reflecting on the problem; they usually present the problem, but they do not give space to the solution, propose it, or give ideas. Furthermore, this is perhaps related to the issue of insecurity and the fear of making mistakes. (SI 1, M, Social Assistant, 35 years old)

This difficulty in making creative proposals and daring to move beyond the critical analysis of reality in the search for alternatives for the transformation of these situations of social unrest is worrying. However, as the supervisor states, it is necessary to delve into whether it is a weakness in the training process, whether it is attributable to the insecurities of young students in the training process, or whether what has been pointed out above has an impact on the use of social networks as a reliable source of information. The new generations have unlimited access to information; however, access to scientific knowledge requires reading reliable sources, which students do not always have access to because the information that circulates on networks is usually more concise and less complex, which limits the understanding of the social, political, and cultural phenomena that students face daily in their practices.

Regarding the implementation of this course, as a mechanism to strengthen professional training based on the role of those who supervise practices from the professional field, a positive assessment is appreciated insofar as it constitutes an instance to reflect and share concerns about the supervision of practices, not only concerning the methodological and training process but also from the human perspective, understanding that students also have their own life stories and subjectivity that are at stake in the process of professional practice. This is evidenced in the following excerpt from a field professional:

these instances make us reflect and understand what happens with the Being [...], where our students come from, how they entered the University, under what conditions, often motivated perhaps by their families, and not by themselves [...] That is why we must be constantly analyzing where we are and whom we deal with. (SI 1, M, Social Assistant, 35 years old)

In this sense, the narrative of professionals who supervise practices highlights the importance of dialogic construction in supervision processes without ignoring the human dimension of the "other." This human dimension is a key aspect of the learning process because other emotional resources come into play along with the cognitive resources that students deploy. Cognitive processes such as attention, memory, concentration, and decision-making are closely related to emotions (Ortega-Navas, 2010). In this regard, the literature on emotional education states that emotional regulation, self-management, interpersonal intelligence, emotional awareness, and other skills for life and well-being of students can be strengthened (Bisquerra-Alzina, 2003), all of them are skills of great value in the practice of Social Work. Despite the lack of empirical studies related to the impact of emotional education in a university context (Bracamontes-Ceballos *et al.*, 2024), increasingly, the emotional literacy of teachers is being promoted so that they have the skills to identify, understand, regulate, and think with emotions intelligently, and in this way, and in this way, to achieve more emotionally prepared students (Cabello *et al.*, 2010).

3.3 The role of supervision and field professionals who supervise practices

According to what is stated in the literature (Litvack *et al.*, 2010; Rawles, 2020; Roulston *et al.*, 2021), supervision in Social Work can be understood as a process of accompaniment from a "hands-on educator" who acts as a thoughtful partner who encourages collaborative exploration of ideas, through their experience and practical knowledge, expanding and challenging the reasoning that arises from the students and validating their proposals, through positive reinforcement and feedback. In this way, students can develop situated knowledge and skills through reflective discussions (Ketner *et al.*, 2017). When consulting one of the supervisors regarding how she understands the supervision process, she states:

I have always understood supervision as a process of accompaniment (...) orientation and guidance, and that has feedback that goes back and forth; that is to say, I give feedback to the student, and the student also gives feedback to me. (SI 5, M, Social Worker, 59 years old)

On the other hand, they recognize the importance of critical reflection and reflective discussion in the process of accompaniment; however, they state that on many occasions, supervision focuses on pragmatic and instrumental aspects, such as the description of actions, more than the necessary articulation of theory and practice. This recognition of the importance of moving toward an improvement in supervisory processes is essential since the quality of these processes significantly impacts the quality of the training of Social Work professionals (Sweifach, 2019). This is evidenced in the following extract referring to what happens in the supervision process:

There is more of a reading of the actions and monitoring of actions rather than making the student reflect on some problems. That leaves us with a lot to think about regarding how we supervise and make our students reflect and contribute. (SI 1, M, Social Assistant, 35 years old)

This concern is consistent with what is reported in the literature since the reflective discussion, which constitutes the central aspect of supervision in Social Work, requires a dialogical construction of narratives to eliminate formulas. Therefore, those who supervise need to be open to dialogue and reject their theoretical-methodological certainties (Litvack *et al.*, 2010), inviting students to propose rationally and collaboratively with new ideas that improve intervention. Regarding this dialogic dimension, a supervisor points out from her experience:

I ask them: "What do you think of such a situation? Do you know of such a situation? Do you know such public policy? Do you know of such an organization? What is your opinion?". Asking questions because I want them to be able to see details and to build their opinion on the different things we do to create this kind of feedback. (SI 10, M, Social Assistant, 50 years old)

This motivation towards the students, so that they can realize their reflections on the practice, turns out to be a fundamental task in the supervision process, as it favors the learning of new knowledge and skills by confronting the previous knowledge that students bring from their training, with the complex reality it faces in practice. Consistent with what has been pointed out in the literature regarding the importance of reflective discussion for the development of students' knowledge and skills (Brodie & Williams, 2013; Rawles, 2020; Wilson & Flanagan, 2019), one of the supervisors points out:

I invite students to have a critical reflection on the reality that they would face (...) dimensioning historical elements, inequities in the territories (...) things we can observe

critically, to be able to make a diagnosis that is not something descriptive, that is reflective, where these elements are combined. (SI 5, M, Social Worker, 59 years old)

Along the same lines, the professional refers to the importance of including in the supervision process feedback spaces, as well as supporting the integration of students in practice into the team:

I think it is important in the first place to guide the context in which the practice develops, showing the challenges and its critical knots, then hold periodic feedback meetings in order to clarify, introduce remedial elements, and at the same time, make the successes visible in such a way as to motivate and reinforce the positive aspects of the student. Integration with the rest of the work team should also be facilitated, which allows them to feel attached to a project and know its particular dynamics. (SI 5, M, Social Worker, 59 years old)

This concern for including students in work teams is reinforced in other reports:

To do everything possible so that the professional in training is inserted in a healthy, trusting environment and that they feel part of the team (SI 6, M, Social Worker, 40 years old), adding a relative dimension to the quality of the work environment "Facilitate their process by providing an adequate environment of respect, where they can feel comfortable to carry out and generate work proposals in different situations. (SI 11, M, Primary Education Teacher, 48 years old)

On the other hand, the relevance that is given to the stories is observed not only to the methodological aspects of supervision as a formative, reflective, and dialogic space but also the importance of having environments conducive to learning in emotional terms (Bracamontes-Ceballos *et al.*, 2024), alluding to the fact that the practice center is a space in which the student feels comfort and confidence.

Provide a space where the student feels comfortable and confident to communicate and provide feedback on strengths and weaknesses. To be able to see their improvements based on what has been analyzed and what has been reviewed in their actions. They should be able to work together and give space so they can carry out actions alone. (SI 3, M, Social Worker, 30 years old)

This requires a level of maturity of the students, self-analysis, and introspection of their training process, which has been called "reflection in practice," according to the supervisor:

Promote a self-critical look at the practice process, where the student himself or herself self-evaluates a problem or situation to be solved, in this way to be able to know the limitations or complexities that it is not yet able to solve with the available tools or the knowledge achieved so far, returning by itself to previous training processes to resume and reinforce them in search of improvement and excellence. (SI 13, M, Social Worker, 43 years old)

In general, the incorporation of students in internships and supervision is valued as an opportunity for growth and updating, as pointed out by a field supervisor:

Both the students and we, as supervisors, learn a lot; they give us a fresher look at the exercise of the profession. Suddenly, we get stuck when we mechanize or 'robotize.' So, I stay with that, an educational-cooperative process, and with horizontal guidance. (SI 12, H, Social Worker, 31 years old)

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this work was to analyze the main challenges for professional training and internship supervision identified by supervisors of professional practice of Social Work students at the Catholic University of Chile in southern Chile, considering the tensions that are faced by the profession in this country. In this regard, professionals who supervise practices agree on the impact that neoliberalism has had both in the reduction of the State and its role in the social well-being of citizens, as well as in the public policies and programs in which the professionals work and where students in the practice of the Social Work career are inserted. In this regard, the fundamental importance of solid ethical-political and critical training, as well as theoretical and methodological, is recognized as the social phenomena that the profession faces daily in Chile in particular and in Latin America in general; they are expressed in scenarios of deep inequalities, exclusion, and social injustices. In this regard, one of the participants recognizes that this ethical-political commitment is not present in all those who supervise students' internships. Therefore, the University and the career have a fundamental role in not neglecting the accompaniment in the training processes generated from the practice spaces. On the other hand, the importance of the intercultural perspective is emphasized, especially about interventions with Indigenous peoples, considering sociocultural diversity as a wealth, which requires students in practice and proactive professional teams that do not uncritically replicate hegemonic actions that make invisible the different ways of life present in local spaces.

As for the training processes, there is a generalized criticism of the difficulties students have in theoretically based their actions and reflections on practice, which is more evident in the shortcomings of the written texts produced by the students. Also, the poor management of digital resources by students is evident. Although it is true that in the experience of supervisors, students show a wide use of social networks, they lack the mastery of platforms and ad hoc digital tools for professional practice. On the other hand, they express a concern about the lack of creativity in the design of proposals for professional action, which can be attributed to weaknesses in training, personal insecurities, and the fear of making mistakes, typical of practice experience. Therefore, if we understand those who supervise as "practical educators," incorporating the emotional training of practice supervisors in Social Work becomes a relevant challenge for higher education institutions that train professionals in this discipline.

In contrast, these professionals are called to play a role as co-trainers. Among the strengths, attitudinal aspects such as disposition and proactivity stand out. These identified strengths and weaknesses must be addressed in the intra-classroom training processes and the field through professional practices at all levels.

Concerning supervision, in the speeches of professionals who supervise professional practices, there is a representation of the role of supervisor based on the motivation of situated learning and critical reflection on professional intervention in the particular context in which it occurs. However, the importance of considering aspects such as diversity, inequality, and institutional variables is raised, and the prominence given to the subjects with whom the intervention is carried out is very incipient, appearing scarcely relieved in the supervision process itself. Professionals have a discourse coherent with the ethical and socio-political commitment of the training provided at the University, aimed at denouncing inequalities and injustices and seeking to transform these conditions of oppression. On the other hand, it highlights the importance given to the tasks of feedback and support, carried out within the framework of supervision, in order to contribute to the development of knowledge and skills of the students through reflective discussions (Ketner *et al.*, 2017). Likewise, in the reports of the supervisors, an effort to promote the autonomy of the student is observed, encouraging the generation of their proposals, as well as their inclusion in teamwork, in a climate of trust and mutual support, which coincides with actions surveyed in the literature on supervision (Beesley, 2023; Mendonça *et al.*, 2023; Miehls *et al.*, 2013; Rama-Vitale, 2011; Roulston *et al.*, 2021) and with the literature referring to emotional education as an element that generates personal and social well-being, and the role that emotions play in student learning (Bracamontes-Ceballos *et al.*, 2024). It also highlights an assessment of the incorporation of students in practice as an opportunity to update knowledge and stimulate their own "reflection in action" on the part of professionals who supervise internships of Social Work students.

Finally, we consider that this meeting space between academics who accompany practice processes and supervisors in the field is an initiative that deserves to be replicated in the processes of university training in Social Work, as it contributes to greater coherence in the training process by combining criteria and expectations between both actors, regarding student performance, it favors the relevance of training by contrasting said performance in a real context, in situations typical of professional practice, and finally, it contributes to highlighting the importance of the link with the environment for the teaching task, valuing the contribution of field professionals in the training of students, through supervision processes. Concerning the *e-learning* modality, this favored participation. At the same time, the professionals came from practice centers in different communes, and the flipped classroom favored active dialogue in asynchronous spaces. At the same time, they already had theoretical-conceptual inputs to enrich the reflection and analysis of their own experiences.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in the writing or publication of this article.

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Ethical statement

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