

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FACTOR-INWENTASH  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

# The State of Field Education and Emerging Best Practices: A Scoping Review

Marion Bogo and Karen Sewell  
2020

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## Overview of Webinar

- Current Context of Field Education
- Scoping Review
  - Findings
- Emerging Best Practices
- Discussion

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## Poll - Our audience members:

- Field Instructors
- Field Coordinators/Directors
- Faculty Members
- Students

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### Current Context of Field Education

- Distinctive pedagogy: learn to integrate theory, research, and practice
- Current crisis leading to more students and fewer practicum learning opportunities
- Impact of the pandemic

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### Current Context of Field Education

- International Crisis:
  - Funding cutbacks to agencies
    - higher caseloads
    - more complex cases
    - less time for social workers to take on a student
  - Agency commitment to education
    - variable
    - commitment to take a student left to individual social worker

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### Current Context of Field Education

- More programs
  - greater number of students needing practicum
  - distance online programs leads to more competition in local community
  - more disciplines and professions wanting placements
- Diverse student body
  - high fees
  - family responsibilities
  - more students needing weekend and evening placements

Ayala et al., 2018; Cleak & Zuchowski, 2019; Gushwa & Harriman, 2019; Hay et al., 2019; Tam et al., 2018; Williamson, 2020

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### Scoping Review

- **Previous Reviews**
  - Bogo 2005; 2015
  - Holden et al., 2011
- **Purpose:** Provide an overview and understanding of contemporary field education empirical literature
  - Inform field instructors about best practices
  - Evidence can guide schools
  - Identify most pressing research needs
- Empirical studies from January 1, 2013 – June 30, 2019

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### Scoping Review – Objective and Research Questions

**Objective:** To synthesize the state, nature, extent, and emerging best practices and principles in the current empirical literature on field instruction.

**Research questions:**

- 1) What is the state of the empirical literature (i.e., range and extent) on social work field instruction?
- 2) What is the nature (i.e., topics, design and methods, theoretical frameworks, outcomes measured, and incorporation of culture and diversity) of the social work field instruction empirical literature published during this period?
- 3) What are the emerging best practices and principles for social work instruction?

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### Scoping Review - Methods

- **Framework** (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005):
  - 1) identification of the research questions;
  - 2) identification of relevant studies;
  - 3) selection of studies; data charting;
  - 4) collation, summary; and
  - 5) report of the results.
- **Data base search**
- **Hand search**
- **Reference list search**

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## Scoping Review - Criteria

**Inclusion:**

- 1) peer-reviewed empirical journal articles
- 2) written in English
- 3) published between January 2013 – June 30, 2019
- 4) focused on: field instruction; social work disciplinary orientation; undergraduate or graduate level field education; student or field instructor participants.

**Exclusion:**

- 1) focused on integrated field seminars or the faculty field liaison role only
- 2) included only field coordinators or directors as participants.

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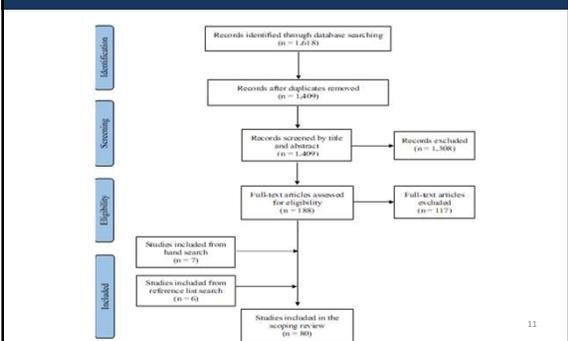
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## Scoping Review Search and Screening Process



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## Scoping Review Results

- Jan. 1, 2013 – June 30, 2019
- **N=80**
- **Year:**  
2019=9%\*; 2018=19%; 2017=13%; 2016=14%;  
2015=13%; 2014=16%; 2013=18%
- **Methods:**  
Qualitative=50%; Mixed Methods=36%;  
Quantitative=14%
- **Topics:**  
Experiences=24%; models=21%; evaluation=18%

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### Scoping Review Results

- **Country of origin:**  
U.S.=28%; Australia=25%; **Canada=4% (6<sup>th</sup>)\***
- **Design:**  
Cross-sectional=80%; longitudinal=20%; most prevalent = cross-sectional, mixed methods survey (21%)
- **Outcomes:**  
Measured = 18% → competencies=10%
- **Culture and diversity:**  
No mention=48%; brief = 18%; different countries=19%; integrated=16%

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### Poll: Two practices do you rate most highly:

- Welcoming learning-focused organization and team.
- Supportive field instructor/student relationship.
- Adequate number of challenging case assignments.
- Relevant reading references and bibliography.
- Process recordings.
- Observation of social workers.
- Observation of the student's practice – live or recorded.

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### Key Elements in Field Instruction

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### Best Practices in Field Instruction

- Competence of instructor -social work practitioner
- Student- field instructor relationship
- Structure and process
- Learning activities
- Reflective dialogue

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### Competence of Instructor as Social Worker

- Observation of practice facilitates learning through modeling
- Observation and de-briefing promotes linkage of theory and practice. Leads to ability to conceptualize practice
- Professional role models influence students' professional identity

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### Student-Field Instructor Relationship

- Available, approachable, flexible, reliable
- Emotionally supportive and open to hearing about students' struggles. Challenge for new learning
- Collaborative – both share knowledge and experience

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### Student-Field Instructor Relationship

- Importance of discussing how they can handle differences of opinion, power dynamics, and conflict
- Students who felt judged experienced anxiety and fear

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### Structure and Process

Important activities:

- Regular, available field instruction sessions with an agenda
- Orientation to agency, policies, and social work role
- Collaboration in setting learning goals and a plan

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### Structure and Process

- Teach about dimensions of field instruction – process and importance of relationship
- Clear expectations about:
  - accessing information about client interviews
  - content and process of field instruction sessions
  - responsibility for material for sessions.
  - boundaries between education and focus on self-awareness vs. therapy
  - conflict resolution

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### Learning Activities

- Client and community assignments
- Multiple learning opportunities to practice
- Observing practice – giving positive and constructive feedback
- Opportunities to use feedback in rehearsal for practice through role play or simulation

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### Reflective Discussion

- Based on data from client/community assignment
  - Review assignment progress
  - Review student learning and performance
- Critical thinking – linking theory and practice
- Developing self awareness

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### Contextual Factors

- Organizations that welcome students
- Many social workers and team members provide learning opportunities for students
  - Shadowing and debriefing

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## Discussion

Enduring best practices

Challenge of context – less time for field instruction

Innovations needed

- Will they include these practices?
- Are these practices necessary in new approaches?

Inter-organizational partnerships needed: organizations, funders, governing bodies, educators, researchers, and practitioners

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## Limitations

- Potential inadvertent & unintentional omission of sources
- Dependent on the available information
- Quality of evidence was not assessed
- Inherent subjectivity in decisions

• **Mitigation:**  
Protocol, multiple researchers arriving at consensus

Peters et al., 2020

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## Q & A



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### Full References

Full references available from:  
 TFEL website  
<https://tfelproject.com/resources/>  
 (forthcoming)

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