



FACT SHEET

PROMISING PRACTICES

Synopsis

The Prairie Report on Promising and Wise practices in Field Education study identifies innovative, promising, and wise practices throughout the Prairie Regions of Canada. Participants were invited to share their experiences in field education to identify innovative, promising, and wise practices. This report summarizes the promising practices identified in the Prairie region interview findings and is a starting point to begin to identify how those promising practices may inform the development of sustainable models of social work field education in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Promising practices, as defined in this study, are approaches, interventions, programs, services, or strategies that show potential for enhancing field education. They may address specific challenges experienced in social work field education. Promising practices may be undergoing evaluation for effectiveness and replicability and have demonstrated the ability to achieve their stated aims.

OBJECTIVE

To identify innovative, promising and wise practices throughout the Prairie region, which include the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

METHODOLOGY

Between July and December 2020, virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 participants, consisting of field coordinators, field educators, field instructors and supervisors, and representatives of field agency partners. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams platforms and consisted of 20 open-ended questions in three thematic areas. All interviews were first recorded and transcribed and subsequently a codebook was developed. Three documents were created for each interview participant: a verbatim coded transcript, a three-column code book document, and a summary interview sheet.

FINDINGS

Promising practices may address specific challenges experienced in social work field education and are currently being evaluated for effectiveness and replicability and have demonstrated the ability to achieve their stated aims.

The study identified five themes on promising practices:

- community needs
- non-traditional practicum opportunities
- supervision strategies
- open-mindedness
- group processing

ANALYSIS

Community Needs

Defined as field education considering the needs of the community and how field education may support those needs. This was discussed in relation to the role of partnerships and collaborations with multiple stakeholders and creating a community of practice that brings together diverse groups and organizations.



“Field’s always been interesting to me. I really see the social work profession as something that’s collective and something that is part of community. And I think mentoring emerging professionals is really part of that.”



ANALYSIS

Non-traditional Practicum Setups

Defined as the need for more atypical field placement options. Creative and innovative opportunities were identified in non-traditional social work agencies. Similarly, self-directed placements that are designed to maximize student learning and interests were identified as a promising practice.



"I think in terms of thinking outside the box or being creative and innovative in our field practicums there are opportunities to do more work with those agencies - in non-traditional social work agencies - where maybe they don't have on the ground social work supervision, but they are amazing opportunities for our students."



Open-mindedness

Defined as encouraging students to keep an open mind about practicum placements, organizations, or populations they want to work with. A promising practice is for field education and supervision to remain open to the various opportunities that could work for students, and be open to the potential for innovation and the challenges presented.



"It just means that there's more openness in education and the realization that education has many more sides and then much more depth that we could tap and in doing that, students then become better learners and are more in tuned to themselves and to others. And then they can go forward in a more comfortable and confident way."



Supervision Strategies

Defined as individual, micro-level supervision strategies that enhance student learning, growth, and development.



"How to make those adjustments from a skill-based perspective. And to keep experimenting and trying and to practice deliberately. Sort of break things down into smaller parts to be able to practice that independently and then practice that with a supervisor to get feedback."



Group Processing

Defined as group processing or group supervision strategies including within practicum seminars.



"I can imagine that bringing together students for group supervision, you know, who are supervising students. Some would be really valuable as well, and providing them training, so yeah, so it is it is, you know, I don't think it's any less resource intensive to be doing some of these innovative practices, but just different in the way that we use those resources."



CONCLUSION

Some key themes that emerged from the interviews include the use of supervision strategies to work within a rigid, bureaucratic system that is slow to change, and the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and culture throughout social work education. Participants also highlighted feelings of social responsibility regarding students in that they had a duty to assist in education and providing a rewarding field education experience. The Covid-19 pandemic was viewed both as an additional barrier within an already stressed system but also as a potential transition point for future field education evolution. There is a need for social work programs to reevaluate the conceptualization, structure, and delivery of field education to prepare the next generation of social workers. Likewise, new practices, insights and approaches to teaching and learning will allow social work education to evolve and thrive in increasingly demanding social contexts, educational landscapes, and labor markets.