



FACT SHEET

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Synopsis

The Prairie Report on Promising and Wise Practices in Field Education study presents the findings of a research study designed to identify innovative, promising, and wise practices in social work field education throughout the Prairie regions (provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). This fact sheet summarizes the key findings on innovative practices as identified in the study.

INTRODUCTION

The current crisis in the Canadian social work field education exists due in part to resource scarcity and increasing student enrollments. These challenges could be addressed by introducing innovative practices that have the potential to enhance field education and address some of the challenges in the field. These innovative practices were identified by experienced social work field educators in the Prairie region.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this fact sheet is to present new, creative, and innovative practices, that have the potential to enhance field education.

METHODOLOGY

- Between July and December 2020, 35 semi-structured interviews consisting of 20 open-ended questions were conducted virtually on Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms. Participants were social work field instructors, field directors/coordinators, and faculty liaisons in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.
- All interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed by student research assistants under the supervision of experienced researchers.

FINDINGS

- Innovative practices have the potential to enhance field education while addressing existing challenges but are not currently considered evidence-based. This is due to the fact they have not been tested yet.
- The study identified five themes on innovative practices: technology, flexible options, creativity, macro-level placements, and taking risks.

ANALYSIS

1. TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS (THE USE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS) IN FIELD EDUCATION



"(...) We've actually seen things like Zoom [and] Microsoft Teams to be able to be the way that we connect right so? The students are really eager, and they're interested in that, and that's what we're here for is to help them achieve their learning goals."

2. A VARIETY OF FIELD EDUCATION OPTIONS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF DIVERSE STUDENTS

"I think organizations need to be more flexible and offer more placements to students."



3. THE USE OF CREATIVITY AS A WAY OF IMPLEMENTING AND ENCOURAGING CHANGE



“Maybe there [are] opportunities to do more work with those agencies maybe considered more non-traditional social work agencies (...) they are amazing opportunities for our students.”

4. THE NEED FOR MORE SUPPORT FOR MACRO-LEVEL FIELD PLACEMENTS

“It's all about community organizing and traditionally, social workers are supposed to be good community organizers, so I feel like that is a part which could be strengthened.”



5. THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING RISKS THAT SUPPORT INNOVATIVE PRACTICES



“We need to set aside the existing models of field education because they've [...] only served us so far. And we need to let it's time to let go of that.”

CONCLUSION

- Key themes that emerged in the interview findings include the use of supervision strategies to work within a slow system, and the importance of incorporating Indigenous voices.
- 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 evolution.
- Innovative practices in teaching and learning will allow social work education to evolve and thrive in increasingly demanding social contexts, landscapes, and markets.