

# What is quality work-integrated learning? Social work tertiary educator perspectives

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While the benefits of work-integrated learning (WIL) are undisputed, identifying what elements enable quality experiences is a more challenging endeavor. This article focuses on the perspectives of New Zealand social work tertiary educators regarding components of quality WIL. The participants recognized the difficulties in succinctly articulating quality WIL but agreed with previous research that effective WIL is reliant on strong relationships between the tertiary sector, organizations and students. Findings from this research attest to the importance of placing field educators into this traditional tripartite relationship thus celebrating their central role in student learning. Addressing poor professional practice in the WIL environment was an identified concern. Effective use of the national field education guidelines for the evaluation of WIL experiences is recommended. The assessment of student readiness and suitability for specific environments also requires ongoing consideration from HEIs alongside mitigation of the potentially negative impacts of WIL.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, New Zealand, quality, social work, field educator, student

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is central to the tertiary education curriculum across multiple disciplines and has an integral role in the development of new professionals (Bogo, 2015; Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a). The purpose of WIL is often understood as enabling students to have authentic experiences in relevant learning environments and so has a focus on the integration of theory into practice contexts, frequently in work-based placements (Ferns & Moore, 2012; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). WIL is, however, an umbrella term for a range of practice activities but for the purposes of this article will refer to the teaching and learning process that occurs in real world organizational contexts with structured supervision and as a compulsory part of an academic program with assigned learning outcomes (Henderson & Trede, 2017; Patrick et al., 2009). The common term 'practicum' will be used interchangeably with WIL.

In recent years, concerns have been raised by the New Zealand education sector about the quality of WIL (Tertiary Education Commission [TEC], 2009). In the social work profession, the proliferation of tertiary programs since 2006 has placed increasing pressure on tertiary educators to locate practicum that offer appropriate learning opportunities for students (Hay, Ballantyne & Brown, 2014). Moreover, finding quality practicum is resource intensive and the commitment of tertiary educators and the wider sector to this critical aspect of student learning is often minimized or overlooked (Hay & Brown, 2015). Definitions of a 'quality' practicum may also vary amongst key stakeholders and the diversity of expectations can lead to confusion, distress or frustration for students, field educators, managers and tertiary educators alike (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Previous research on social work WIL in New Zealand is limited (see for example, Chilvers, 2018; Davys & Beddoe, 2000; Hay, Dale & Yeung, 2016; Maidment, 2001, 2003) and has focused largely on seeking student and field educator (registered social worker in the agency) perspectives on aspects of WIL such as supervision, adult learning and satisfaction. This study sought to add to this literature by examining what elements are critical to ensure 'quality' social work practicum from a wider range of perspectives including students, field educators, tertiary educators, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers and the Social Workers' Registration Board (SWRB). This article focuses on the views of tertiary educators from

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eleven of the seventeen New Zealand higher education institutes (HEI) who are employed to work in WIL programs.

All social work degree students in New Zealand undertake a minimum of 120 days of practicum in two different organizational settings (Social Workers Registration Board, 2017). The SWRB, the government entity that regulates and is responsible for recognition of tertiary programs, set parameters around the curriculum, organization, monitoring, and assessment of WIL. Although there is considerable regulation, historically HEIs have used different terminology, expectations, learning outcomes and assessment requirements. In recent years, there has been a move towards establishing common labels for the key WIL stakeholders and benchmarking their role in the WIL process (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2016). As Henderson and Trede (2017) note:

Shared understanding contributes to a common dialogue and language across university, industry and student. Through a common language, students who are central to the work place learning experience, are better placed to actively inform and shape experiences and accompanying assessment that verifies outcomes of work-based programs are met (p. 74).

The national field education guidelines detail the expectations for field educators, organizations and HEIs and include four domains that enable good practice in WIL: administration; assessment; teaching and learning; and quality (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2016). A limitation of the guidelines is that they are not enforceable, however, together with the SWRB program recognition standards (Social Workers Registration Board, 2017) they stipulate expectations for social work WIL in New Zealand. While these documents provide parameters for WIL, they do not necessarily ensure students receive what tertiary educators would expect from a quality WIL experience.

#### QUALITY WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The benefits of WIL have been canvassed extensively (Chilvers & Hay, 2011; Coll & Zegwaard, 2011b; Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010). Challenges, however, remain in HEIs as to recognition of its importance, with repeated accounts of associated expenses, resourcing constraints, misunderstanding about what WIL encompasses, and limited appreciation of its academic standing (Chilvers & Hay, 2011; McRae & Johnston, 2016; Smith, 2012). Canadian researchers McRae and Johnston (2016) have encouraged the development of a global WIL framework that incorporates the following key attributes of quality WIL: experience in a workplace setting; curriculum integration of workplace learning and academic learning; student outcomes that lead to employability; and reflection. Bogo (2010, 2015), a leading academic in social work WIL, has recommended four foundational principles that are relevant across all organizational contexts:

- 1) [it] takes place within an available and supportive relationship;
- 2) learners benefit from a balance between structure and autonomy in practice and learning;
- 3) learnings need to develop reflective and conceptual capacities; and
- 4) observation, reflective discussion, and a provision of constructive feedback facilitates mastery of skills (Bogo, 2010, p. 105).

In the New Zealand context Martin, Rees and Edwards (2011) identified that good practice in WIL comprise the following elements: organization set-up; student preparation; skill development; assessment and pedagogy; professional standards and competencies; and supervision. Drawing on international student practicum experiences, Lowe and Hay (2016) proposed that placement debrief be

added to this framework. Further, Agnew et al., (2017) also emphasized placement debriefing and partnerships as critical for good WIL experiences and recommended expanding the Martin et al., model.

WIL occurs within dynamic contexts and myriad factors affect the 'quality' of the experience from all stakeholder perspectives (Noble, 2011). The quality of the learning experience, supervision, preparation and debriefing experiences have all been cited as important for WIL although exactly what is meant by 'quality' is likely to differ across stakeholders as well as disciplines (Bates & Bates, 2013; Dove & Skinner, 2010; Hay, et al., 2016; Lowe & Hay, 2016). The WIL literature emphasizes that strong relationships within a tripartite relationship of HEI, host organization (often referred to as 'industry') and student is key for ensuring good learning experiences (Henderson & Trede, 2017; Lowe & Hay, 2016; Peach, Ruinard, & Webb, 2014). Within the host organization, the field educator has an essential role in supporting and educating the student and so it could be argued that quality WIL is reliant on a quadripartite rather than a tripartite relationship.

In social work practicum, field educators may wear several 'hats' including as coach, assessor, educator, role model and supervisor (Hay, Dale, & Yeung, 2016; Kadushin, 1991; Zuchowski, 2014). They are expected to assist with the integration of theoretical learning and practice and facilitate reflective practice (McCafferty, 2018). This critical reflection may be part of formal arrangements such as professional supervision and assessment or informal, formative conversations and feedback processes (Lucas, 2017; Peach, et al., 2014). Recent research from New Zealand indicated that field educators and tertiary staff agreed that students should have skills in reflective practice and critical thinking prior to the practicum but these are utilized and thus further developed during WIL (McCafferty, 2018). Despite their important role, previous research with social work field educators suggest that they often face significant challenges including "workload pressures, limited managerial support, ensuring appropriate tasks for the student and the availability of resources" (Hay, Dale, & Yeung, 2016, p.39). Similarly, the findings from Fern and Moore's (2012) study highlighted that time and funding pressures on field educators limited the provision of student support. Managers of the host organizations then also have responsibilities for enabling quality WIL (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Importantly, they need to have a supporting structure that encourages a culture of learning so a focus remains on the provision of meaningful learning opportunities for the student (Hay & Brown, 2015). This structure may include relevant policies, procedures and physical resources as well as sufficiently prepared staff who are willing to support and supervise the student (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Recognition of the role, time and expertise of the field educators is essential (Henderson & Trede, 2017).

Tertiary educators consult with students, the field educator and organizational management about the expectations and requirements for the WIL experience. Careful liaison and clear communication before and during the practicum are necessary for quality assurance of sufficient and relevant learning opportunities (Noble, 2011). Tertiary educators may also mediate, problem-solve and monitor, often during face-to-face visits or classroom/online sessions, throughout the duration of the practicum (Cleak & Venville, 2018). These Australian authors surveyed fifty-three students and forty-seven field educators on their levels of satisfaction with the tertiary liaison experience and recommended that strengthening the liaison role, through adequate work loading and resourcing, would encourage WIL organizations to see the value placed on them as practicum providers and thus encourage their continued commitment to providing quality student opportunities (Cleak & Venville, 2018). Zuchowski's (2015) Australian study also reported that tertiary educators require an intimate knowledge of the student's needs, the practicum context, as well as the program requirements to ensure a quality WIL experience. Tertiary educators have a responsibility to understand the complex network

of people and organizations, who may or may not, share the same priorities and perspectives about WIL (Jackson, 2018).

Students are the central stakeholder in WIL. The compulsory nature of WIL in many disciplines may put inordinate pressure on students and result in significant personal and financial sacrifices. Student learning likely decreases when their focus is on other issues, such as financial stability and food insecurity, and raises questions as to how students facing these challenges can experience optimal learning on practicum (Hemy, Boddy, Chee, & Sauvage, 2016). In an Australian survey of 2,320 social work students, the compulsory practicum was viewed by a majority of students as a burden (Gair & Baglow, 2018). The researchers advocated for policy reform, particularly in increasing government financial support for tertiary students, flexibility in the WIL curriculum, and increased understanding from the sector as to many students' current realities (Gair & Baglow, 2018).

While WIL has been increasingly adopted in higher education curricula, the learning of students undertaking practicum can be unpredictable and quality assurance across the key stakeholders can be difficult (Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014; Smith & Worsfold, 2015). Several studies, across different disciplines, have noted disparities between the understandings of different stakeholders of WIL leading to uncertainty about suitable student activities, learning objectives, assessment, and the expectations on the field educator, student and host organization (Coll & Eames, 2000; Dove & Skinner, 2010; Ferkins, 2002; Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014; Fleming & Haigh, 2017; Smith, 2012). As WIL is integral to many students' academic programs, the perspectives of New Zealand social work tertiary educators on what quality WIL is for this discipline warrants further investigation.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach to facilitate the goal of accessing tertiary educator perceptions of quality WIL. Semi-structured focus group or individual interviews allowed the generation of data by drawing on the lived experiences of the participants (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls & Ormston, 2014). The interview questions were developed after consideration of the literature and the previous stage of the project that focused on agency manager perspectives of quality WIL (Hay & Brown, 2015). Ethical approval was sought and approved by Massey University prior to data collection (13/43). Protection of confidentiality was strongly considered due to the limited number of tertiary educators engaged in WIL in New Zealand. The reported data and quotations are not attributed to specific participants and the neutral pronoun of 'they' is used to assure anonymity.

Fifteen tertiary educators from eleven HEIs participated in either individual interviews (n=9) or focus groups (n=2) over the period June–December 2014. Educators taught in social work degree courses across regional and metropolitan institutions, and in both universities and polytechnics. The educators were directly involved in WIL activities including teaching, assessment, organization and monitoring of practicum and liaison with industry.

The interview data was analyzed using qualitative analysis processes outlined by Babbie (2013) and the Framework Approach (Ritchie et al., 2014). Firstly, the interviews were transcribed and collated under the interview question headings. Next, a thematic index was developed for each question and associated charts were created. The charts mapped the nature of the data and associations between themes were identified. Finally, the qualitative responses were grouped under five substantive themes that related to defining quality WIL and each of the significant stakeholders in enabling quality WIL experiences. These are further discussed below.

## FINDINGS

The following themes represent dominant perspectives across the educator responses. Importantly, the tertiary educators recognized that quality WIL is multi-faceted and thus challenging to define. They all emphasized quality WIL is dependent on a combination of factors connected with the four major stakeholders: the tertiary provider; the field educator; the organization/management; and the student.

### *Defining 'Quality WIL'*

The tertiary educators were often hesitant to define 'quality WIL'. One educator challenged the use of the word 'quality' and went on to explain how this buzzword may look different to WIL stakeholders depending on their expectations, the context and the student. Aligned with other views this person concluded that "the variable is relationship. So that's actually the center of a quality practicum, and you can emerge from what looks like something that might not work so well with a fantastic practicum with fantastic learning" (P1). The following characterization of quality WIL reflected several comments focused on student learning:

I think it's really difficult to define exactly what we mean by a 'quality' practicum. If I was to try and come up with some succinct little definition I think it would be something that was along the line of ensuring that everyone and everything involved in the practicum is focused on facilitating learning (P2).

### *The Role of Tertiary Educators*

The participants agreed the work of the tertiary educator is critical for ensuring quality WIL experiences for students especially their essential role in building strong relationships with students and industry partners:

So because of the relationship you're able to manufacture quite a successful practicum. And this might be a student that needs quite a bit of support but it's successful because of that relationship that you may have in the [WIL] team with the field educator and knowing this student as well (P1).

A significant amount of preparation before students begin their work-based experience provides a strong foundation for WIL. The educators believed this "needs to be embedded in an ongoing conversation, right from day one when students join us that they are preparing for going out to have a 'real world experience'" (P4). Students can then understand the relevance of teaching content, the emphasis on critical reflection and the need for theoretical learning. Educators recognized their responsibility to prepare both students and field educators so that everyone was ready for the WIL experience:

...the onus is on us to do that preparation. To make sure that everyone, students and field educators, are fully aware of what is expected of them, what the learning requirements are, what things need to be achieved while on practicum, what happens with supervision and how students need to be supported on practicum (P5).

Establishing clear lines of communication and on-going dialogue contributes to the field educators having a sense of "the university's got their back" (P1) especially if challenges arise during the practicum. Similarly, approachability was highly valued so that "they [field educators] feel that if they ring us they're not going to get fobbed off" (P1).

The field educators need to be given the tools to provide quality supervision, to know its value, to understand why we emphasize it, to know about student learning, adult learning theories and they need to know how to support a student in those first couple of weeks (P6).

Several educators emphasized the importance of the practicum allocation process and the need for careful consideration of the fit between the student and the organization. One educator viewed it as a "creative and intuitive" (P6) activity that relied on in-depth knowledge of the student as well as the organizational context. Clear expectations from the tertiary provider are essential to support this fit:

And I think that practicums that don't work well for students often comes back to a mismatch. That either they've been thrown in the deep end and they're actually drowning, or they've been either overprotected by the field educator or just not given the opportunity within the context to do things that stretch them and they feel like they're just going through the motions...it's just pitching it right (P2).

Understanding the learning needs and capabilities of the student as well as specific organizational contexts and the preferences of field educators is a considerable challenge for tertiary educators:

What makes a quality practicum is trying to find the fit for the student. What does the student want from the practicum? What are their expectations around a practicum? Also really listening to the organization about what they think is really going to support them and what does their ideal student look like. And try and actually do some of that brokerage between the two. We don't just kind of flick out random people to random organizations and cross our fingers and hope for the best. We actually do some of the work first (P4).

#### *The Role of the Field Educator*

The field educator's role was celebrated as a core element of quality WIL and seen as "one of the biggest determinants of a quality practicum" (P4) although a caveat around this view were expressed by one educator:

If you have someone that just sees the student as time and effort that they don't really have time for you're not going to get a good practicum. You're going to have a student feeling like they're a third wheel and that they shouldn't really be there (P6).

Field educators who understood the teaching and learning process and encouraged students to take time away from work-related tasks in order to critically reflect were seen as enabling quality practicum. Conversely, field educators who did not demonstrate good practice to students presented a challenge to HEIs about whether to place a student in that organization again:

I have gone back to organizations afterwards and had robust conversations with them about what I've seen as bad practice and actually said "and this is why we won't be placing students with you again", which is disappointing and its hard and there's no way that I can then monitor how that's going, I don't get any feedback as to whether anything has changed (P5).

The educators valued a holistic approach to supervision that incorporated more than administrative and case-related reflection and where "the students feel safe and trust the supervisor [and so] talk more openly" (P3). Many field educators experience considerable workload pressures and because a student adds further demands, organizational support was deemed necessary:

It's hard for very, very busy social workers to find time for students, so having reduced caseloads to recognise the work that it takes to have a student, or access to further education, professional development, and time release so they can do that would work really well in terms of promoting quality or excellence in [WIL] (P5).

### *The Role of Organizations and Management*

As illustrated above, several educators emphasized the importance of the organization's management being committed to the WIL experience:

I think they [managers] can get in the way if they don't acknowledge that it's going to take time and energy. Like they can put barriers up, and if they understand what the student is there for, things tend to go better (P11).

The educators were remarkably consistent in their views of the organizational environment, including other staff, being a significant influencing factor on the quality of the WIL experience. They discussed the impact of staffing changes, restructuring, office space, office politics, available resources such as a place where students "can park their stuff" (P5) and "whether the team is on board with having a student" (P7). Alongside an enabling environment, educators emphasized the organization should be "geared towards the learning needs of students" (P4) and offer opportunities for "shadowing someone rather than doing, at least initially" (P8). Allowing a student to make mistakes and subsequently learn from these also supports a quality learning experience. Having a WIL structure in place was encouraged through the development of appropriate policies and procedures so that the student has "a really good, clear induction of what, who the agency serves too, and what the agency does" (P9).

The educators supported the idea of managers incentivizing WIL and "putting some things in place which actually value the role of the field educator and see that as a significant professional activity" (P2) or as this educator wistfully commented:

Quality practicum for all students, [sigh]. I can't highlight enough that connectivity and having organizations motivated to release their workers to come in and do training about practicum...recognising that that is good for their organization and it's also good for us (P5).

### *The Role of the Student*

The educators stressed that students have to understand their role in the practicum and be committed to personally preparing for the experience. This included developing an awareness of their values, knowledge and skills although interpersonal capabilities were considered most important for the practicum:

Real basics, getting on with people, not rocking the boat. And I find they don't have to be brilliant. Like it's not about academic brilliance or talented with skills actually. I think organizations, in my experience, are really gracious about that stuff. They just expect someone who's willing to have a go, that's willing to try, that's willing to listen and learn and fit in (P11).

Practicum creates anxiety in many students, and this may inhibit their personal and professional development: "If students are absolutely freaking out about going on practicum then they potentially close themselves down to learning opportunities" (P4). Addressing internal angst and external pressures was viewed as essential:

They need to also be able to be free on practicum to concentrate on practicum, and not be so focused on achieving their assessments, or studying...or even ecological stressors like work-life-study...so that when they are on practicum they're actually focused and they're concentrating on this practicum is a gift for me, this is my time to explore and have fun really (P5).

Similarly, another educator spoke at length about student wellbeing:

Being well is something that's really important, in terms of ensuring the quality of the practicum. If you're not well, or things aren't well within your whānau (family), then we need to know that ...cos that will have an impact on your ability to do well within the practicum (P10).

Linked to a previous theme about the organizational environment, the educators were emphatic about the importance of students committing themselves to becoming involved in the culture of the organization and "taking the initiative to get things done instead of just sitting back and waiting for a field educator to tell them" (P9). In sum, the educators elucidated multiple components that contribute to quality WIL and that link to each of the four primary stakeholders. As one educator remarked: "it's a whole orchestra really, no one thing. But when it all works together it's lovely" (P1).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Enabling 'quality' WIL experiences for students is a key responsibility for tertiary educators. The goal of this study was to examine their perspectives on quality WIL and the results have endorsed previous literature that emphasizes the complexity of this undertaking (Cooper et al., 2010; Ferns & Moore, 2012; Smith, 2012). To a considerable extent, the results reflect the national and international literature on the components that contribute to quality WIL, in particular, organization set-up; student preparation; and available and supportive relationships (Agnew et al., 2017; Bogo, 2010; McRae & Johnston, 2016; Lowe & Hay, 2016; Smith, 2012). The emphasis placed by the participants on the critical role of the field educator in the practicum agency warrants further consideration and the findings also offer an opportunity for further deliberation of how the quality of a WIL experience may be affected by the readiness and suitability of students.

The educators' views aligned with Bogo's (2010) principle of students needing an available and supportive relationship to enable quality WIL. In social work practicum, the primary relationship during WIL is between the student and the field educator in the organization. The field educator's core responsibility is to facilitate the integration of previous classroom learning with relevant practice experiences (Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2016). The importance of access to the field educator and their role in providing feedback has been canvassed elsewhere (Peach et al., 2014; Smith & Worsfold, 2015). The results in this study recognized the pressures on field educators, and the participants were concerned that adequate time and space for WIL education, and especially critical reflection, might not be readily available to students. This suggests that while the expectation and intention may be there to encourage a robust supervisory and critical reflection process, in reality, this may not occur (Henderson & Trede, 2017; Smith, 2012). It may be the case that students are missing this critical component of WIL if field educators are not allocated enough workload release time for supervision and education or do not adequately understand their role. The educators encouraged organizational management to consider incentivizing WIL and increase recognition of it as a beneficial professional, developmental process for their staff. The recent adoption of national field education guidelines by the Council for Social Work Education and the social work professional body presents an opportunity for field educators and organizations to assess their current WIL practice in accordance with the four domains of Teaching and Learning; Administration; Assessment, and Quality (Aotearoa

New Zealand Association of Social Workers, 2016). The evaluation of how the tasks in each domain have been met could also be extended to students and the HEIs in an endeavor to strengthen the quadpartite WIL relationship. The educators also raised an important concern about students witnessing poor professional practice within the host organization. This finding has not been addressed in the New Zealand literature and is an important future research area.

Student readiness for WIL is often premised on passing pre-requisite courses, having enough disciplinary knowledge to begin the theory-practice integration process, and in the social work discipline, meeting the regulatory fit and proper person criteria (Smith, 2012; Social Workers Registration Board, 2017). The present study highlighted a focus on appropriate fit between a student and their field educator or the organization itself rather than a student's readiness stemming from previous course completion. This finding is supported by Hay and Brown (2015), who recommend increasing attention by HEIs on the development and assessment of attributes and interpersonal capabilities of students. While pre-placement preparation and post-placement debriefing have been attributed as elements of quality practicum and use of course grades as eligibility criteria for WIL has been considered (Agnew et al., 2017; Bates & Bates, 2013; Dunn, Schier, Hiller, & Harding, 2016; Martin et al., 2011), this finding suggests a re-examination of what constitutes readiness and suitability for WIL and how a good fit can be determined. While all the other elements of a quality practicum may be present, if a student is not ready to engage, have the required attributes to be able to access the available learning opportunities, or cannot become integrated into the practicum environment, then WIL success is unlikely. Relatedly, the educators stressed the importance of student's wellness and their ability to manage the multiple responsibilities during WIL. Recent Australian research by Gair and Baglow (2018) on the stress associated by students on practicum seems pertinent. Reflecting the voices of educators in this study, they identified that juggling practicum, work and family and other responsibilities puts considerable pressure on students' health and well-being during the practicum. Although WIL is increasingly common in HEIs, more thought about its structured, regulatory nature and the potentially negative impact this has on students is also required. Research across the New Zealand HEI sector is critical and additional support by HEIs, for example fuel vouchers, a clothing or accommodation allowance, or increased recognition of prior practice experience, could significantly address the concerns from this study.

Finally, in contrast to McRae and Johnston's (2016) proposal, the educators did not highlight student outcomes that may lead to employability as a key aspect of quality WIL. This is interesting as all students in social work degree programs in New Zealand must have achieved core competencies that enable them to become registered (and consequently more employable) prior to graduation. Historically these competencies are assessed in the final practicum. Employability then was not highlighted as a primary outcome of quality WIL.

## CONCLUSION

Quality WIL is likely to remain somewhat ambiguous with disciplinary and stakeholder variance, however at its heart is an emphasis on all stakeholders being committed to facilitating student learning. A commitment from all four of the key stakeholders: the tertiary educators the field educator; the organization; and the student, to the WIL activity is required with each understanding the expectations of the HEI. The centrality of WIL to academic programs is expanding although this is not necessarily reflected in a recognition by HEIs that it is an academic and resource-intensive endeavor (Cleak & Venville, 2018; Henderson & Trede, 2017). Similarly, WIL stakeholders need to assess current resourcing, work loading, validation and the professional practice of field educators engaged in WIL

activities. Tools such as the Social Work National Guidelines can assist in the evaluation and development of current WIL practice. Finally, assessment of student readiness and suitability requires ongoing consideration from HEIs and the potentially negative impacts of WIL should be mitigated. As this educator indicates, there is too much at stake:

Practicum is the lifeblood of [tertiary] education and it's so vital and it's so precious and if we don't get it right for our students, if we don't assess them well enough, if we don't support them when they're out on practicum, if we don't maintain our relationships with our communities so that there are practicums for them, then it undermines the whole [tertiary] programme... and it's also how our students get their jobs. It's everything, there's ripple effects every which way in terms of practicum (P5).

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