

Work-integrated learning experiences of Autistic co-op students at a Canadian university: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

MERYSSA WAITE¹

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

ELEANOR A. WHITE

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland

GRACE IAROCCHI

ELINA BIRMINGHAM

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada

The current study sought to better understand the experiences of Autistic students in work-integrated learning (WIL), identify barriers and facilitators to their successful engagement in these programs, and provide actionable recommendations for improving support. A participatory interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was adopted, led by a team of Autistic and non-Autistic researchers. Five current and former Autistic co-op students from a Canadian university participated in a semi-structured interview, sharing their experiences in WIL. The findings highlight both the benefits of WIL and significant barriers to inclusion, including limited availability of postsecondary supports, a tendency to attribute difficulties to personal shortcomings, ambiguous workplace expectations, and communication breakdowns. Participants offered actionable recommendations for improving the accessibility and inclusivity of WIL for Autistic postsecondary students.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, co-operative education, autism, interpretative phenomenological analysis, student voice

It is well-established that Canadian Autistic adults face substantially higher rates of unemployment compared to the general population (Statistics Canada, 2017; Zwicker et al., 2017). Autistic individuals are increasingly pursuing postsecondary education (Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, 2022) with the intention of improving their employment outcomes (Cherian et al., 2021). Yet, they report that existing postsecondary services and supports are insufficient and ill-fitting (Lucas et al., 2022; Pesonen et al., 2021b; Wolpe, 2024; Zeedyk et al., 2019). For instance, while work-integrated learning (WIL) programs have the potential to improve employment outcomes for Autistic students (Grandin, 2020; Janice et al., 2021; May, 2018; Pesonen et al., 2021b), the current lack of autism-specific WIL research and resources may limit the accessibility and effectiveness of these programs.

Autism can be conceptualized as a neurodevelopmental profile characterized by constellations of differences in how one experiences and interprets their world, including in the areas of social interaction, communication, sensory processing, and attention (Botha et al., 2021; Brown, 2011; Green & Shaughnessy, 2023; Hare, 2024; Pellicano & den Houting, 2022). This definition of autism aims to reflect the preferences of the Autistic community and aligns with the social model perspective and neurodiversity paradigm, where Autistic traits are viewed as variations in human neurodiversity, while disability arises from inaccessible social environments (Hare, 2024; Pellicano & den Houting, 2022; Shakespeare, 2006). Autism is also often defined from a medical or clinical perspective as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by differences in social communication and interactions, along with restricted and repetitive behaviors or interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). In line with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)'s emphasis

¹ Corresponding author: Meryssa Waite, addl@sfu.ca

on participants' lived experience and meaning-making (Shaughnessy et al., 2024) and guided by an Autistic-inclusive approach that prioritizes Autistic voices and recognizes epistemic injustice in autism research (Thom-Jones & Lowe, 2024), participants of the current study were invited to share their own definitions of autism. Their responses highlighted "how broad the spectrum can be," with some noting challenges in interpreting social cues, others emphasizing how its impact varies based on one's traits and environment, and some expressing the felt pressures to conform to a neurotypical society, with one participant stating that autism "manifests as a disability due to the fact that interactions expected for participation in society are often exhausting and anxiety inducing for me." Definitions and conceptions of autism have shifted significantly over the years and remain in flux, with increasing contributions from the lived experiences of the Autistic community (Green & Shaughnessy, 2023; Milton & Green, 2024; Pellicano & den Houting, 2022; Shaughnessy et al., 2024). Throughout the current paper, identity-first language will be used, as this is the terminology currently preferred by many of those in the Autistic community (Botha et al., 2021; Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021; Bury et al., 2020; Price, 2022). 'Autistic' is capitalized in recognition of and respect for Autistic identity, culture, and community, similar to how 'Deaf' is capitalized when speaking about Deaf identity (Benham, 2015; Pineo, 2022; Price, 2022).

WIL programs provide experiential learning opportunities to postsecondary students, leading to numerous beneficial employment outcomes and offering an important opportunity for students to gain skills and work experience within a supported environment (Itano-Boase et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2023; Stabenow & Anderson, 2024). These programs play a critical role in helping graduates avoid the "no-experience-no-job cycle" and therefore ease the transition from school to work (Statistics Canada, 2014, p.23). Because of the extensive benefits associated with WIL, there has been a move in Canada to expand on these programs to better support students entering the workforce (Government of Canada, 2019; May, 2018). However, students with disabilities are less likely to participate in WIL programs, and when they do, they are more likely to face discrimination and accessibility barriers (Alphonso, 2021; Jackson et al., 2023, 2024; Stabenow & Anderson, 2024). Autistic postsecondary students are less likely to access WIL programs than students without disabilities and students from other disability groups (McLeod et al., 2019). There is a recognized need for more deliberate and equitable access to WIL for Autistic postsecondary students in Canada (Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, 2022; Luey, 2014). Canadian Autistic students themselves have reported that they would access supports created for neurodivergent postsecondary students if available, including programs aimed at preparing them for experiential learning programs and the transition into the workforce (Fane, 2024).

The limited research that exists examining Autistic students' experiences in WIL suggests that this group faces several barriers. Canadian university staff report that these students face significant challenges and often lack adequate support, partly due to uncertainty about how to best support them and what accommodations may be most appropriate (Janice et al., 2021). Similarly, Autistic students have highlighted a lack of awareness about supports available within their WIL programs (Pesonen et al., 2021b). Autistic students experience difficulty securing WIL placements (Vincent, 2020), with some reporting being rejected from work placements after disclosing their Autistic identity (Sullivan, 2023). At their placement sites, Autistic students encounter many barriers, including supervisors' lack of autism understanding (Sullivan, 2023). They also describe feeling pressure to conform and conceal their Autistic identity (Dollinger et al., 2023a; Sullivan, 2023). Other barriers reported by Autistic students are related to social demands, sensory environments, and expectations for flexibility at their work placements (Anderson et al., 2024).

WIL programs are characterized by an active partnership between the student, their postsecondary institution, and their placement site, yet students are often overlooked when it comes to designing quality WIL experiences (Drewery et al., 2026). While existing research on WIL highlights the importance of considering the perspectives of students (Drewery et al., 2016, 2026), there is a notable gap in research focusing specifically on Autistic students' experiences. As co-creators of WIL, students' voices are essential in developing programs that are accessible and inclusive (Drewery et al., 2026; Eady et al., 2025). Therefore, more research is needed to examine Autistic students' experiences and gather their input on how to best support them in WIL. More broadly, there is a recognized need to center Autistic voices in autism research (Fletcher-Watson, 2024; Green & Shaughnessy, 2023; Shaughnessy et al., 2024; Stetson, 2024).

The current study, led by a team of Autistic and non-Autistic researchers, adopted a participatory IPA approach to examine Autistic students' experiences in WIL. Building on prior research, this study focuses on WIL in a Canadian context and employs a participatory approach with a neurodiverse research team. Because IPA prioritizes small, homogeneous samples, this study explored students' experiences in a single Canadian university's flagship WIL program, co-operative education (co-op). This study presents initial findings from a larger project exploring how to best support Autistic students in work-based WIL programs. IPA was employed as a methodological approach and theoretical framework to inform both our research design and data analysis. A participatory IPA approach was taken to center the voices of Autistic students, recognizing them as the experts of their own experiences and enabling a rich and detailed account of their stories (Howard et al., 2019; MacLeod, 2019; Shaughnessy et al., 2024). WIL is associated with a variety of improved employment outcomes (Itano-Boase et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2024), and thus offers an important opportunity for Autistic Canadians, who face persistent barriers in the workforce (Stabenow & Anderson, 2024; Zwicker et al., 2017). However, the existing literature suggests that Autistic students are not adequately supported in these programs (Anderson et al., 2024; Janice et al., 2021; Sullivan, 2023). To address this gap, the current study sought to better understand the experiences of Autistic students in WIL. Barriers and facilitators to their successful engagement in these programs are identified and actionable recommendations for improving access and retention for Autistic students in WIL are provided.

METHODS

Sampling and Recruitment

Participants were either current or former Autistic co-op students from a single Canadian university. Consistent with the idiographic focus of IPA, a small and relatively homogenous sample was recruited (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Spiers & Smith, 2020). Sample sizes of three to six participants are common with IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). A small sample allows for detailed analysis of both individual experiences as well as patterns and divergences seen across the group (Spiers & Smith, 2020). IPA sampling methods tend to be purposive (Shaughnessy et al., 2024). Therefore, participants were recruited through the university's disability office, WIL office, and student groups, as well as through snowball sampling and social media posts. Participants were compensated for their time. A total of five adult participants ages 21 to 30 years old ($M = 26.80$, $SD = 4.09$) with a reported formal diagnosis of autism were included in this study. Of the participants, 3 were current students (2 undergraduate, 1 graduate), and 2 were graduates with full-time employment. Participants were each assigned a pseudonym, which they were invited to choose. Sample characteristics are summarized in Table 1 and descriptive statistics are presented in Appendix A, including information about participants' autism traits, depression and anxiety symptoms, and work readiness.

TABLE 1: Sample characteristics ($N = 5$).

	Frequency
Gender	
Male	2
Female	1
Non-binary	1
Questioning	1
Program Department	
Computing Science	4
Communications	1
Mathematics	1
Cultural/Ethnic Background	
Canadian	3
White	2
Indian	1
Vietnamese	1

Note. Participants with joint majors were listed under each relevant department for their program of study; Participants provided their ethnic or cultural background in an open-response format, which resulted in some responses falling into multiple groups listed above.

Work-Integrated Learning Survey Questions

Participants completed a brief online survey detailing their education history, WIL placements, and whether they disclosed to the WIL office and their WIL placement supervisor. Participants also rated their satisfaction with their overall WIL experiences, the support they received from their placement supervisor, and the support they received from their postsecondary institution's WIL office using a five-point rating scale (very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). These questions were informed in part by the questionnaire used by Dollinger et al. (2023b).

Semi-Structured Interview

A series of interview questions were developed collaboratively by our team's Autistic and non-Autistic researchers as well as an Autistic community consultant. These questions explored participants' experiences in WIL, covering topics such as their motivations for engaging in WIL, their experiences seeking and participating in placements, and their recommendations for making WIL programs inclusive and supportive for Autistic students. The interview protocol, created prior to the interviews, was used as a flexible guide rather than definitive and final, allowing the interview to be responsive to participants' responses (Howard et al., 2019; Spiers & Smith, 2020).

Procedure

The current study was approved by Simon Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics (#3000268). The research design was collaboratively created by a team of Autistic and non-Autistic researchers and community members. Reflexivity practices, including keeping a research journal and engaging in ongoing team discussions, were used to bring explicit awareness to researcher positionality and to ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants' lived experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Heselton et al., 2021; Jootun et al., 2009; Milton, 2010; Stetson, 2024; Ugiagbe et al., 2025). Prior to participating in the study, participants received a document outlining the research procedures and completed an online consent form. Before their interview, participants also completed an abbreviated and adapted Research Passport (Ashworth et al., 2021), which included questions regarding their pronouns, autism terminology and communication preferences, break accommodations, comfort and accessibility needs for the interview (e.g., call format, use of closed-captions, attendance of an Autistic researcher or support person), and information about the researcher they would be meeting. To support the accessibility of the interviews, participants were also sent the questions ahead of time (Heselton et al., 2021; Nicolaidis et al., 2019). The semi-structured interview was conducted over a recorded Microsoft Teams call. Participants had the option to complete the interview over an audio-only call, videocall, or in text using the chat function. All participants chose to meet over an audio-only or videocall. Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and were sent back to the participants, who were invited to modify or expand on their responses either over email or through a second call. Sharing transcripts allows participants more time to reflect on the questions and their responses, offers an alternative format to engage with the interview, and serves as a tool to ensure the accuracy of the interview data (Birt et al., 2016; Howard et al., 2019; Thom-Jones & Lowe, 2024).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The current study adopted a participatory interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. IPA is a qualitative methodological approach that explores lived experience in detail by centering participants' voices in examining how they make meaning of their personal experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Spiers & Smith, 2020). This approach is participant-centered and led, recognizing and respecting participants as the experts of their own lived experience (Alase, 2017; Emery & Anderman, 2020; Shaughnessy et al., 2024). Participants and researchers engage collaboratively in meaning-making, as researchers strive to interpret how participants understand their personal experiences (Howard et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2009). This flexible and collaborative approach lends itself well to participatory-research designs (Bush et al., 2019; Emery & Anderman, 2020; Heselton et al., 2021; Shaughnessy et al., 2024). As such, IPA is becoming an increasingly common approach in autism research (Howard et al., 2019) and is recognized as a well-suited methodology for capturing the lived experience of Autistic individuals (Cooper et al., 2022; Heselton et al., 2021; Huws & Jones, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2021; O'Neill & Kenny, 2023; MacLeod, 2019; Moore et al., 2024; Treweek et al., 2019; Underhill et al., 2024). Previous research has demonstrated the suitability of IPA for exploring Autistic students' experiences in WIL, with Sullivan (2023) collecting rich and powerful accounts of five current and former Autistic WIL students.

Qualitative data analysis followed the six-step process described by Smith et al. (2009), which has been applied as a phenomenological approach in autism research (Howard et al., 2019; Shaughnessy et al., 2024). First, participant interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed in detail through repeated readings. Second, for each case, exploratory notes were written. Third, experiential statements were

developed from these notes. Fourth, initial themes (personal experiential themes; PETs) were generated from these experiential statements. Fifth, this process was repeated for each case. And sixth, initial case-level themes were examined across the sample to identify patterns and divergences, leading to the development of group-level themes (group experiential themes; GETs). PETs generated independently by the first two authors, MW and EW, were compared and discussed for each case and GETs were generated collaboratively. Multiple team members collaboratively analyzed data to ensure comprehensive interpretation. Data analysis jointly led by Autistic and non-Autistic researchers, in combination with a participatory-research approach, also helps ensure a nuanced and accurate understanding and sharing of Autistic participants' experiences (Emery & Anderman, 2020; Heselton et al., 2021; Holmes, 2020; Thom-Jones & Lowe, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants of the current study were at different stages in their co-op experience, with two participants having completed their co-op programs, two participants part-way through their programs, and one participant who was never placed, despite interviewing. All participants had experience in an optional undergraduate co-op program at the same postsecondary institution. Charlie, a current undergraduate student, completed their co-op program over three different placements which totaled approximately fourteen months of full-time work. Kris, a graduate diagnosed with autism after completing his undergraduate degree, completed twelve months of full-time work across two co-op placements. Reese, a current graduate student, partially completed one eight-month placement during his undergraduate degree, resigning after five weeks of full-time work. He will be starting another co-op placement later this year, this time required for his graduate program. Magikan is currently enrolled in their co-op program, has completed several interviews, and is set to begin their first placement. Wren is a graduate, and although she was accepted into the co-op program and engaged in a couple of different placement interviews, she was never hired. Four of the five participants were registered in the university's disability office, or Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL), during their co-op program. Regarding disclosure, of the five participants, two reported that their co-op advisor and placement supervisors knew they were Autistic, two participants did not disclose, and one was unsure. Participants' co-op placements took place in both community settings (business, not-for-profit, and governmental organizations) as well as within the university. Table 2 summarizes participants' student status, disclosure, and satisfaction with their co-op experiences.

TABLE 2. Participants' Current Student Status, Disclosure, and Co-op Satisfaction (N = 5)

Participant	Student Status	Disclosure	Overall Co-op Satisfaction	Satisfaction with Co-op Office	Satisfaction with Placement Employers
Charlie (they/them)	Undergraduate student	Yes	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
Kris (he/him)	Graduated	No	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied
Reese (he/they)	Graduate student	No	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied
Magikan (they/them)	Undergraduate student	Yes	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied
Wren (she/her)	Graduated	Unsure	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Somewhat satisfied

Note. Disclosure = Whether participants disclosed their Autistic identity to their co-op office and placement supervisors; Satisfaction = Participants were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their WIL experiences, as well as with the support offered by the WIL office and placement employers, using a five-point rating scale (very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied).

From participants' interview responses, five superordinate themes were generated: (1) benefits of WIL, (2) understanding autism, (3) barriers to accessing postsecondary supports, (4) barriers in placements, and (5) improving support and accessibility. These themes and their subthemes are described in the following section.

Theme 1. Benefits of WIL: "I would recommend it to literally everyone who wants to get a job"

Participants spoke to a wide range of benefits gained from their co-op experiences, spanning work experience, career insights, personal understanding, and meaningful connections. These findings highlight the value of WIL programs and the importance of ensuring their accessibility for Autistic students. For example, Charlie described, "it's really valuable in getting like a leg up compared to your peers and stuff because when you all graduate, a lot of you are going to be competing for the same work,"² while Kris noted, "I would recommend it to literally everyone who wants to get a job," and Reese shared, "I learned a lot about myself and about my relationship with work." Participants' positive takeaways align with benefits identified by Autistic WIL students in previous research, including clarifying career goals (Pesonen et al., 2021b), recognizing strengths and capacities (Vincent, 2020), and forming positive relationships (Sullivan, 2023).

Theme 2. Understanding Autism: Embracing Heterogeneity and Challenging Stereotypes

Autism is often misunderstood and inaccurately stereotyped in ways that do not capture the variability of Autistic experience. Accepting the true heterogeneity of autism is crucial to understanding and improving Autistic students' experiences in WIL.

The heterogeneity of autism: "We're not a monolith"

Participants emphasized the heterogeneity of autism, describing that Autistic people encompass a wide range of experiences, identities, strengths, and support needs. Challenging the painting of Autistic

²Following participant feedback, repeated single words and fillers (e.g., "uh" and "um") were removed from participant quotes to support readability

people with the same brush, Charlie powerfully expresses: “we’re not a monolith.” Reese echoed this sentiment, describing the personal nature of autism and how “most people don’t know what autism means to me and you kind of can’t because it’s personal to me.” Magikan, too, emphasized how “each person is different.”

Reese highlighted how stereotyped expectations of autism can paint a narrow picture, describing how “people have this expectation of what Autistic people are like,” relating to stereotypes of awkwardness in social situations when this is not always the case. Charlie stresses the importance of recognizing variation by listening to individual experiences:

...some of us have like contradictory or like incompatible needs like there are sensory seekers and then there are people who get sensory overstimulated, like there’s no one-size-fits-all, so I think that just listening to us and learning about like the general overarching needs and complications of autism can go a long way.

This aligns with Bowman’s (2020) argument that recognizing the diversity of Autistic experiences and providing personalized accommodations is essential. Notably, Charlie described how even accepting statements can play into stereotypical and narrow understandings: “I’m not even talking in a stereotypical like, ‘Oh, they’re detail-oriented and good with numbers, so let’s put them in computers,’ ... no, autism can manifest strengths in so many different ways for every different person with it.”

The benefits of disclosure and accommodations hinge on understanding

Autism knowledge and attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping workplace opportunities and barriers for Autistic people (Annabi & Locke, 2019; Bowman, 2020; Remington et al., 2022), with employers and supervisors having a substantial impact (Dreaver et al., 2020; Pfeiffer et al., 2017). A lack of understanding and knowledge can hinder the effectiveness of accommodation and disclosure. Magikan described how they received accommodations in the interview process to reduce penalization for Autistic traits, yet a lack of understanding persisted: “a lot of these interviewers, they don’t really know, like even with the accommodations in place, I feel like I’m getting rejected because of my lack of eye contact and monotone voice.”

Reese highlighted how disclosure experiences are shaped by the person being disclosed to: “a lot of the time the reaction to someone being Autistic is very clumsy and overly broad... it’s hard because most people don’t really know how to react.” They additionally connect this to the workplace environment generally, stating that: “you don’t have to avoid talking to me, but I don’t want to be in the same room as you for eight hours a day... so it’s complicated.”

These nuanced complexities align with Black et al.’s (2020) emphasis on workplaces increasing acceptance and understanding while simultaneously diminishing stigma to foster open communication. Charlie suggests moving beyond simple awareness: “not just awareness but acceptance... going past the idea of accommodating also like acknowledging that we can be pretty damned skilled, we can be smart.” Autistic advocates oppose simple awareness, arguing awareness is rooted in medical model understandings that frame autism as something to be concerned about, while acceptance aligns with social models of disability that appreciate diversity (Anderson, 2024; Dever, 2021).

Negative perceptions and stereotypes

Pervasive stereotypes frame disabled individuals as less productive, competent, and able, often leading to assumptions that they are ill-suited for the workforce (Jackson et al., 2024; Stabenow & Anderson, 2024). Multiple participants described how negative perceptions of autism presented in their WIL experiences. Reese stated that “the biggest barrier for a lot of Autistic people I’ve met in terms of a job interview would be that they come off a little Autistic.” Kris described how Autistic traits are associated with “weird”-ness. In this context, autism itself becomes a barrier not because of inherent deficits but because of how it is perceived in employment contexts. Magikan described how “I got unsolicited feedback saying that I sound monotone, I sound bored, like they don’t think I want this role... the interviewer gets confused or thinks that I’m not professional.”

With negative perceptions of autism so readily available, it makes sense that Autistic individuals internalize them. Reese described how responses to disclosure made him feel, stating that “most people are a little surprised, which I take as a compliment.” Similarly, Charlie related this to perceptions of intelligence: “I like to think that I’m pretty smart, and not just for an Autistic person.” These statements reflect how autism is a stigmatized social identity because it diverges from the ‘ideal’ neurotype of neurotypicality (Walker, 2021). One response to internalized stigma is masking and camouflaging behaviors, which refers to attempts “to hide or obscure Autistic traits in order to ‘blend in’ with neurotypicals” (Price, 2022, p.96) and conforming to neurotypical social norms (Radulski, 2022). Masking is taxing and is associated with a host of adverse mental health outcomes (Bradley et al., 2021; Chapman et al., 2022; Lai & Szatmari, 2020; Pearson & Rose, 2021). In the context of WIL, Sullivan (2023) found that negative stereotypes, especially the perception of autism as inherently unprofessional, can motivate masking and reduce support seeking. Kris described how “we do have this tendency to mask... hide that we’re Autistic or try to act normal.” Similarly, Reese shared how “I don’t have any trouble masking... it wasn’t a problem being Autistic in the interview.” This reflects what Cage and Troxell-Whitman (2019) call conventional masking motivations, whereby these behaviors are used to ‘get by’ in formal settings such as work. However, masking is not sustainable over time. As Reese described:

...I can function very well socially for a set amount of time... I can do this for a job interview, I can do this for a couple hours, but when it’s like ‘it’s been four hours, you need to do it for another four’ that was a big problem.

Theme 3. Barriers to Accessing Postsecondary Supports

Participants identified several barriers to accessing adequate postsecondary support during WIL, ranging from internal challenges, such as self-blame and difficulty recognizing support needs, to structural obstacles, including restrictive eligibility criteria and limited resources.

Challenges seen as internal: “I just need to try harder”

Participants often attributed difficulties encountered in WIL to personal shortcomings rather than external barriers. Reese articulated this tendency:

...actually, that's something as an Autistic person is kind of a problem for me sometimes. I'll be in a situation that's not working out and I'll think, ‘Ok, what am I doing wrong?’ And I won't think, you know, ‘Well, maybe the situation's wrong or maybe someone else is doing something wrong.’ I'll think, ‘I must be - the problem's got to be me because I'm Autistic, right? So what can I do to fit, to make it work?’

Looking back, he recognizes that he needed support: “I should have known by the end of the first week, ‘This is not working out as it currently is. I need help.’” Similarly, Kris described how he often feels as though he needs to work harder, rather than ask for help:

...I end up banging my head against the wall more than I should. I tell my friends the metaphor of it's like, oh, it's like I'm trying to cut down a tree with a kitchen knife and it's not working, and I'm like, ‘Oh I just need to try harder.’

This tendency to see difficulties as internal extends to interpersonal challenges as well. Autistic individuals are often expected to minimize differences in social style and behaviors, placing a one-sided burden on them to conform to the dominant neurotypical norm (Wright & Murphy, 2022). This can be internalized by the Autistic student themselves, leading them to frame solutions around changing themselves rather than seeking support. For example, Wren enrolled in social skill courses as a strategy to address challenges she encountered in the workplace. This felt responsibility to mend communication breakdowns may persist even in cases where Autistic students are mistreated. For instance, despite being teased by their coworkers, Charlie stated that advice on “how to support and maintain relation[ships]” would have been helpful, placing the onus on themselves rather than on those that mistreated them.

Awareness of resources and their fit: “I don’t know what I don’t know”

To access support, students need to know they require help, what resources are available, and how to access them. This was described by Reese, “I think in order to get support I needed to have known to ask for it and to feel like it was something that was going to be available to me.” However, most Canadian postsecondary institutions do not include any information about disability accommodations in WIL on their websites (Gatto et al., 2021a). Participants spoke to a lack of clarity about what resources were available to them. For example, Magikan noted that the school’s website is difficult to navigate, and Wren described not reaching out to the disability office due to uncertainty about whether they support co-op students. Students may also struggle to articulate their needs. Charlie expressed, “I think a lot of Autistic people struggle to like name their needs and like recognize them.” Similarly, Wren described, “I feel like part of the problem is I don’t know what I don’t know... If there’s something I’m missing, I don’t even know if I’m missing it.”

“Red tape” to accessing accommodations and supports

Students may also face bureaucratic obstacles to accessing accommodations. To register with the university’s disability office, students must have a formal autism diagnosis. Magikan described the multi-step process by which they received accommodations, “you had to go get registered in CAL first, the Center of Accessible Learning, and then after that you have to talk to your co-op advisor and your disability advisor.” Even for registered students, navigating the system can be frustrating. Speaking about the disability office, Reese expressed, “I’m always shocked at [university name], the amount of red tape” adding, “I never felt like there was somebody at the - at CAL who knew me and was gonna help advocate for me.”

Availability and approachability of supports

Another identified barrier to students accessing services was the availability and approachability of supports. While some participants had very positive experiences with the co-op office, others found their co-op advisors absent or unhelpful. For example, Magikan shared, “my current advisor, I feel like she’s just there, like I don’t think she’s like as accessible or like as willing to like help.” When Reese reached out to the co-op office for support, he did not receive the help he needed:

...I emailed my co-op advisor and said, 'I really don't think this is working, I'm hating it.' And they said, 'Ok, well, we will go over for a visit in a couple weeks and we'll talk about it then.' And then I quit... when it comes to actually getting help, just sending an email to someone who says, 'Oh, I'll come visit in a couple weeks,' like, that's - it's nothing.

Participants also described a disconnect between the disability office, co-op office, and placement sites. Kris noted, "I have no idea about the communication between the co-op office and my placement providers," while Reese described the disability office as "crazily overworked" and disconnected from the co-op office, stating, "I just assume the CAL and the co-op office are on different planets." This is significant, as the active engagement and collaboration of stakeholders is crucial for creating quality, inclusive WIL programs (Eady et al., 2025; Garant-Jones et al., 2024; Lawlis et al., 2024; Mackaway, 2022; Pennaforte, 2023).

Theme 4. Barriers in Placements

Participants faced several barriers in seeking and completing placements, including challenges with job interviews, navigating communication breakdowns and social dynamics, structural and logistical barriers, and adjusting to unexpected aspects of their placements. Similarly, Autistic adults have reported encountering challenges with traditional hiring practices, structural barriers in the workplace, and navigating the unique social expectations of the workplace (Holc et al., 2024; Scott et al., 2017; Vincent, 2020).

Job interview challenges

Traditional job interviews disadvantage Autistic applicants, as they tend to place considerable emphasis on social norms and interpersonal dynamics (Huffcutt, 2011; Vincent & Fabri, 2022). Magikan highlighted how job interviews may not provide an accurate assessment of Autistic applicants' capabilities and instead contribute to their underrepresentation in the workforce: "eighty percent of Autistic people are either underemployed or unemployed, and I think like it's probably not because like they're like incapable, it's more like the interview process is just difficult for them."

Participants described job interviews as highly stressful. Charlie noted, "interviews make me nervous," Kris echoed this sentiment, sharing, "I do get quite stressed out at interviews," and Wren described that her anxiety about the hiring process led to avoidance of applying to placement sites.

Communication breakdowns and unsaid expectations

Communication breakdowns, challenges interpreting unspoken workplace norms, and feelings of social ostracization were major barriers in students' co-op experiences. Wren shared, "my biggest issues with work are mostly like communication related."

Participants described feeling misunderstood by their placement supervisors. Magikan voiced concerns about being perceived as unprofessional during interviews, while Charlie was told, "I'm very hard to communicate with, people don't understand what I ask when I ask for it."

Unclear workplace expectations were a source of stress. Wren emphasized the importance of making "common sense" social expectations more explicit. Reese described the mental toll of trying to decode unclear interactions, "I can learn a social situation usually when I think I need to, but there was so much like parade, like facade of, 'How can we help you?' And then they didn't help me. And also it was impossible."

Participants also reported feeling socially excluded and othered within their placements. Reese spoke to how lunch breaks became a barrier to inclusion, “Lunch was sort of where everyone bonded and I actually really don't like being around people eating, so I basically ostracized myself from the entire company.” Charlie felt “condescended to” and belittled by both their supervisor and coworkers, describing: “I was placed with about like six other WIL co-op students and they just weren’t very nice to me honestly, like they liked to joke that I was the intern for the interns.”

These experiences reflect broader systemic barriers in the workplace, where neurotypical communication styles and social norms are often prized (Cheriyian et al., 2021). When Autistic individuals do not conform to these expectations, they may be perceived as unprofessional, incompetent, or difficult (Patton, 2019; Price, 2022). Students with disabilities are more likely to report experiences of harassment and bullying at their WIL placements (Cocks & Thoresen, 2013) and Autistic adults have reported facing stigma and workplace discrimination (Botha et al., 2022; Lindsay et al., 2021; Patton, 2019).

Structural and logistical challenges

Various structural and logistical barriers in co-op placements were also identified. Reese shared, “I feel like jobs themselves are kind of poorly structured for some Autistic people, at least for myself, and that's harder to fix.” Participants highlighted how physical workspaces can be a barrier in placements, with Magikan expressing concerns about noise and shared desks. Similarly, Reese stated that it was the inaccessible placement environment that made their autism disabling within their co-op program:

...I see that lunchroom and I think, ‘This is – this is why autism is a disability for me.’ Because this whole space, this whole office, the person who had designed it had no idea what it's like to be Autistic... there was nowhere to hide so I spent a lot of time in the bathroom.

Adjusting to unmet expectations and workplace routines

Participants spoke to how uncertainty, unmet expectations, and adjusting to new routines were all challenging aspects of their placements. Reese, for example, reflected on how his placement did not align with his expectations, stating: “I had a very detailed idea of what my job at the company was gonna be, and it was nothing like it... nothing matched. It was really bad.”

The transition into the workplace can be particularly challenging for many Autistic adults, partly due to changes in routine (Vincent & Fabri, 2022). Kris reinforced this, noting, “difficulty adapting to new things can be a thing for people with autism.” Participants described how adjusting to new workplace routines, such as early start times, long days, and consistent workloads, was challenging.

Theme 5. Improving Support and Accessibility in Co-op: Steps Forward

Participants highlighted key facilitators and provided actionable recommendations for creating an accessible and inclusive WIL experience for Autistic students. These recommendations emphasized the importance of stakeholder autism knowledge and acceptance, flexible and individualized accommodations, clear and concrete communication, holistic supports, and resources informed by lived experience.

Autism knowledge: Call for a double empathy approach

To better support Autistic students in co-op, advisors and supervisors must develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of autism. As Kris powerfully described: “if you increase your understanding of the people, then I feel like things will kind of fall into place, as long as you don't assume you know

everything.” This aligns with the concept of cultural humility, which goes beyond education about cultural differences and emphasizes the importance of ongoing curiosity, self-reflection, and critical thought in improving cross-cultural understanding and addressing power imbalances (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Wright & Murphy, 2022). This importance of autism knowledge among WIL stakeholders was also emphasized by Charlie, “knowledge can go a long way when it comes to working with Autistic folks” and by Wren, “know how Autistic people are different, so that when they are different, they aren’t like surprised by it.” Beyond the current study, students with disabilities have called for more training for WIL practitioners and placement supervisors to reduce stigma and stereotypes about disability in the workplace (Dollinger et al., 2023a).

Participants’ responses demonstrate the need to take an approach that aligns with double empathy, emphasizing mutual understanding and acceptance rather than medical or deficit understandings (Milton, 2012). In workplaces, this could look like adapting inaccessible environments rather than putting the onus on Autistic individuals to conform. Kris explains: “I think things would be easier for everyone if everyone tried better to understand what people are like... if you just help Autistic people with interviewing then that may not help other people deal with them.” Speaking to Autistic students in WIL, Reese highlights this: “you might not be the problem if something’s not working out... just try to be aware of yourself and try to get to the root of why you feel something or why something is a certain way.” Focusing on mutual and reciprocal understanding aligns with research critiquing narrow workplace interventions solely ‘improving’ Autistic traits and communication (Black et al., 2019; Bowman, 2020; Drader-Mazza et al., 2025). For instance, Bury et al. (2021) found that supervisors attributed social challenges to Autistic employees, with interventions focusing on them. However, workplace challenges for Autistic individuals tend to occur because of differences in communication styles between neurotypes rather than solely because of Autistic traits, reinforcing the need for interventions that address both neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals (Ezerins et al., 2024). This also aligns with an ecosystems approach, acknowledging the roles of all stakeholders in creating inclusive WIL experiences (Eady et al., 2025; Itano-Boase et al., 2021).

No “one-size-fits-all” approach

Given the heterogeneity in Autistic students’ experiences, participants emphasized that there is no single approach that can best support all Autistic students in WIL, and instead highlighted the importance of flexibility, individualized accommodations, and open dialogue between stakeholders. As Charlie described, “Listen to us when we approach you because there is no one-size-fits-all for Autistic folks.” Reese similarly posits, “I think just being adaptable is the number one thing.” Participants offered several ways this flexibility could be incorporated into co-op programs, such as by offering remote or part-time placements, creating sensory-friendly spaces in workplaces, and implementing more accessible hiring processes, including task-based interviews.

Concrete guidance: “Don’t mince words”

Participants highlighted the need for more detailed and explicit information and guidance throughout the WIL process. Autistic individuals tend to prefer clear, unambiguous communication, rather than leaving things to be read between the lines (Pesonen et al., 2021a; Price, 2022). Charlie noted that using “more directions and plainer language” could make WIL more accessible, and Kris appreciated learning a “formulaic” approach to placement applications. Participants emphasized the need for direct, proactive discussions to better prepare them for their placements. Wren described, “just try to have a lot of information about things that might be helpful to know... maybe situations that might come up and how to deal with them.” Similarly, Reese expressed, “I feel like something that would have helped would have been frank discussions of what might happen... don’t mince words and just

say like, “This is something that might happen. Here’s what you should do.” Participants found clear, concrete advice particularly helpful, such as guidance on how to seek help from placement supervisors, clarification about requirements versus ‘nice-to-haves’ on job postings, and direct feedback on how to improve interview responses. Participants also suggested several resources to support clearer and explicit guidance in WIL, including a list of available accommodations and resources, mock job interviews, and reminders of how to access services and what supports they offer.

Strengthening mental health supports

Participants spoke to how the difficulties they encountered in co-op extended across multiple areas of functioning, including their mental health and overall wellbeing. Thinking back to his placement, Reese reflected, “honestly, in a lot of ways it almost was traumatic,” further describing, “it’s the most stress I’ve ever been in my entire life... it was awful.” Participants emphasized the importance of addressing social-emotional well-being, executive functioning, and adaptive functioning in WIL. Wren wished the co-op office had connected her to mental health resources, stating, “I think someone should’ve just told me like, ‘You probably have anxiety.’” Kris similarly described, “things that would be good to have is mental health support that’s accessible to [university name] students and those who are in co-op placements.”

Experiential knowledge and Autistic voice

Finally, steps taken towards better supporting Autistic students in WIL should be informed by student voices. Kris stressed the importance of gathering insights about Autistic WIL students’ experiences on “a case-by-case basis, because the variation between people.” Charlie emphasized that resources which center the voices of those with “lived experience” would be “incredibly valuable,” such as online student blogs “demystifying the co-op experience.” Taken together, the results of this study highlight that supporting Autistic students in WIL requires centering their voices and recognizing the diversity of their experiences.

IMPLICATIONS

The current study contributes to our understanding of Autistic students’ experiences in WIL through expanding on the existing literature, including Sullivan (2023), by highlighting participant-identified barriers, facilitators, and recommendations, with a specific focus on co-op in a Canadian context. Participants’ responses emphasized the value of WIL while also revealing significant challenges. Overall, the barriers participants encountered in their co-op placements align with the challenges Autistic adults face in employment, including structural barriers and felt pressures to conform to neurotypical norms (Cheriyian et al., 2021; Holc et al., 2024; Patton, 2019; Scott et al., 2017; Vincent, 2020). This finding aligns with the notion that barriers to inclusive employment in the broader labour market are mirrored in WIL programs (Khan et al., 2024). This is significant, as WIL acts as a “gateway to employment” (Itano-Boase et al., 2021, p.255), easing students’ transition to the workforce. However, if WIL programs replicate existing barriers in the workforce, they may reinforce employment inequities rather than reduce them. Autistic students may thus be “doubly disadvantaged” when entering the workforce, as difficulties in engaging in WIL during postsecondary education can leave them without relevant work experience, making it even harder to compete in an already competitive job market (Vincent, 2020, p.18). Although some participants highlighted benefits of the WIL office, many felt it was disconnected from their placement experiences, with one participant noting, “I just assumed that I was on my own.” This highlights the potential for the WIL office to take a more active role in supporting students and ensuring accessible and inclusive work experiences. To address these challenges, participants in this study offered actionable recommendations for improving WIL

programs, including increasing autism knowledge and acceptance among stakeholders, enhancing program flexibility, and strengthening mental health supports.

Additionally, the findings of the current study highlight the importance of centering Autistic student voices in steps towards improving the accessibility of these programs. Creating inclusive and accessible WIL experiences involves the active engagement of all stakeholders, including students (Drewery et al., 2026; Eady et al., 2025). Yet, Autistic student voices are underrepresented in WIL. Participants described a lack of understanding and acceptance about autism and a felt pressure to work harder when faced with inaccessible environments. These experiences emphasize the need for changes informed by Autistic voices. Participants also highlighted the importance of developing WIL resources that are grounded in lived experience and reflect the heterogeneity of Autistic students. Actively partnering with Autistic students in developing and evaluating WIL programs can help bridge the double empathy gap, foster mutual understanding, and ensure supports are relevant and effective. Such collaboration may also shift the onus away from students conforming to inaccessible environments and instead towards developing WIL programs that better support the diversity of student experiences, recognizing that inaccessible environments and systems are disabling, not individual differences.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Consistent with IPA, the current study's small and relatively homogenous sample was not sought to generalize, but rather allow for a nuanced exploration of individual experiences (Heseltun et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2019). Additional research is needed to capture the experiences of a broader and more diverse range of Autistic students across different institutions and types of WIL.

An important avenue for future research is examining the barriers that deter Autistic students from enrolling in WIL. As one participant noted, "there is this survivorship bias that's present in the nature of the study," as only participants with WIL experience were sought. Given that Autistic students are underrepresented in WIL programs (McLeod et al., 2019), future research should identify obstacles that prevent their participation. Both Alphonso (2021) and Gatto et al. (2021b) found that approximately half of their Canadian student participants with disabilities who had not participated in WIL reported that their disability influenced this decision. A member of our research team, EW, signed up for co-op due to its benefits. However, due to immense anxiety about the process and anticipated barriers due to her Autistic identity, she never made it past applying and being approved.

While there is a need for more student voice research in WIL, it is also important to consider the broader WIL ecosystem (Drewery et al., 2026; Eady et al., 2025). WIL involves collaborative partnerships between three key stakeholder groups: students, WIL staff, and placement employers (Alphonso, 2021; Godden & Hoessler, 2024; Jackson et al., 2024; Thakur, 2021; Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). Therefore, future research would also benefit from seeking the perspectives of WIL staff and placement employers to better understand how to support Autistic students in WIL.

CONCLUSION

The current study explored the experiences of Autistic students in WIL. The findings highlight both the value of WIL programs, including supporting the transition to employment, enhancing self-understanding, and connecting students to caring relationships, as well as the significant barriers to inclusion encountered by Autistic students. These barriers included challenges in accessing postsecondary supports, such as attributing difficulties to personal shortcomings and limited

availability of services, and challenges encountered during co-op placements, such as ambiguous workplace expectations and communication breakdowns. Participants offered practical recommendations for improving the accessibility of WIL, including building autism acceptance, increasing program adaptability, providing holistic supports, offering clear and direct guidance, and centering the voices of Autistic students in actions to support them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Laurel Foundation. We extend our sincere gratitude to the participants who offered their time to share their experiences, perspectives, and thoughtful responses with us for this research.

REFERENCES

- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9-19. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v5n.2p.9>
- Alphonso, M. (2021). *Expanding work-integrated learning opportunities with an accessibility approach*. Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning. <https://acewilbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/formidable/3/Accessibility-Report-2021-06-25-FINAL.pdf>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Neurodevelopmental disorders. In American Psychiatric Association (Eds.), *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed. text rev.). https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787.x01_Neurodevelopmental_Disorders
- Anderson, A. (2024). Autism in April at public libraries: Shifting from awareness to acceptance. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006241287202>
- Anderson, A. H., Stephenson, J., & Carter, M. (2024). A qualitative study of the transition to employment of former university students on the autism spectrum from Australia and New Zealand. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities*, 70(3), 365-374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2022.2091912>
- Annabi, H., & Locke, J. (2019). A theoretical framework for investigating the context for creating employment success in information technology for individuals with autism. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 25(4), 499-515. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2018.79>
- Ashworth, M., Crane, L., Steward, R., Bovis, M., & Pellicano, E. (2021). Toward empathetic autism research: Developing an autism-specific research passport. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(3), 280-288. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0026>
- Baron-Cohen, S., Wheelwright, S., Skinner, R., Martin, J., & Clubley, E. (2001). The Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ): Evidence from Asperger syndrome/high functioning autism, males and females, scientists and mathematicians. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 31(1), 5-17. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1005653411471>
- Benham, J. (2015). *Proud to be Autistic: Metaphorical construction and salience of cultural and personal identity in #StopCombatingMe* [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/420/>
- Biggerstaff, D., & Thompson, A. R. (2008). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A qualitative methodology of choice in healthcare research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 5(3), 214-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880802314304>
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative health research*, 26(13), 1802-1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Black, M. H., Mahdi, S., Milbourn, B., Scott, M., Gerber, A., Esposito, C., Falkmer, M., Lerner, M. D., Halladay, A., Ström, E., D'Angelo, A., Falkmer, T., Bölte, S., & Girdler, S. (2020). Multi-informant international perspectives on the facilitators and barriers to employment for autistic adults. *Autism Research*, 13(7), 1195-1214. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2288>
- Black, M. H., Mahdi, S., Milbourn, B., Thompson, C., D'Angelo, A., Ström, E., Falkmer, M., Flakmer, T., Lerner, M., Halladay, A., Gerber, A., Esposito, C., Girdler, S., & Bölte, S. (2019). Perspectives of key stakeholders on employment of autistic adults across the United States, Australia, and Sweden. *Autism Research*, 12(11), 1648-1662. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2167>
- Botha, M., Dibb, B., & Frost, D. M. (2022). "Autism is me": An investigation of how autistic individuals make sense of autism and stigma. *Disability & Society*, 37(3), 427-453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1822782>
- Botha, M., Hanlon, J., & Williams, G. L. (2021). Does language matter? Identity-first versus person-first language use in autism research: A response to Vivanti. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(1), 870-878. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04858-w>
- Bottema-Beutel, K., Kapp, S. K., Lester, J. N., Sasson, N. J., & Hand, B. N. (2021). Avoiding ableist language: Suggestions for autism researchers. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 19-29. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0014>

- Bowman, A. D. (2020). What we know about employers' perspectives on successfully integrating adults with autism spectrum disorders in the workplace. *International Journal of Psychiatry Research*, 3(1), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.33425/2641-4317.1054>
- Bradley, L., Shaw, R., Baron-Cohen, S., & Cassidy, S. (2021). Autistic adults' experiences of camouflaging and its perceived impact on mental health. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(4), 320-329. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0071>
- Brady, R. P. (2010). *Work readiness inventory: Administrator's guide*. JIST Publishing.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Preparing audio data for analysis: Transcription. In V. Braun & V. Clarke (Eds.), *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners* (pp. 161-172). Sage.
- Brown, J. D. (2018). Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. In B. B. Frey (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of educational research, measurement, and evaluation* (pp. 1559-1560). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139.n647>
- Brown, L. (2011). *The significance of semantics: Person-first language: Why it matters*. Autistic Hoya. <https://www.autistichoya.com/2011/08/significance-of-semantics-person-first.html>
- Bury, S. M., Flower, R. L., Zulla, R., Nicholas, D. B., & Hedley, D. (2021). Workplace social challenges experienced by employees on the autism spectrum: An international exploratory study examining employee and supervisor perspectives. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(5), 1614-1627. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04662-6>
- Bury, S. M., Jellett, R., Spoor, J. R., & Hedley, D. (2020). "It defines who I am" or "It's something I have" What language do [autistic] Australian adults [on the autism spectrum] prefer? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 53(1), 677-687. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04425-3>
- Bush, E. J., Singh, R. L., & Kooienga, S. (2019). Lived experiences of a community: Merging interpretive phenomenology and community-based participatory research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18(1), 1-12.
- Cage, E., & Troxell-Whitman, Z. (2019). Understanding the reasons, contexts and costs of camouflaging for autistic adults. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(5), 1899-1911. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-018-03878-x>
- Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. (2022). *Autism in Canada: Considerations for future public policy development: Weaving together evidence and lived experience*. The Oversight Panel on the Assessment on Autism, CAHS. <https://cahs-acss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CAHS-Autism-in-Canada-Considerations-for-future-public-policy-development.pdf>
- Caro-Fuentes, S., & Sanabria-Mazo, J. P. (2024). A systematic review of the psychometric properties of the Patient Health Questionnaire-4 in clinical and nonclinical populations. *Journal of the Academy of Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry*, 65(2), 178-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaclp.2023.11.685>
- Chapman, L., Rose, K., Hull, L., & Mandy, W. (2022). "I want to fit in... but I don't want to change myself fundamentally": A qualitative exploration of the relationship between masking and mental health for autistic teenagers. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 99(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2022.102069>
- Cheriyian, C., Shevchuk-Hill, S., Riccio, A., Vincent, J., Kapp, S. K., Cage, E., Dwyer, P., Kofner, B., Attwood, H., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2021). Exploring the career motivations, strengths, and challenges of autistic and non-Autistic university students: Insights from a participatory study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14(12), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.719827>
- Cocks, E., & Thoresen, S. H. (2013). *Barriers and facilitators affecting course completions by apprentices and trainees with disabilities*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research. https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0017/9332/barriers-and-facilitators-2597.pdf
- Cooper, K., Mandy, W., Butler, C., & Russell, A. (2022). The lived experience of gender dysphoria in autistic adults: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Autism*, 26(4), 963-974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211039113>
- Dever, M. (2021). Moving from autism awareness to acceptance-language of inclusion. *Canadian Journal of Autism Equity*, 1(1), 23-27. <https://doi.org/10.15173/cjae.v1i1.4985>
- Dollinger, M., Ajjawi, R., Finneran, R., & O'Shea, S. (2023a). Conceptualising responsibility and hostility within WIL placements for students with disabilities. *Disability & Society* 39(9), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2209276>
- Dollinger, M., Finneran, R., & Ajjawi, R. (2023b). Exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in work-integrated learning. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45(1), 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2129317>
- Drader-Mazza, N., Lopez-Kidwell, V., Kanwal, F., Reger, R. K., & Vogus, T. J. (2025). The double empathy problem and person-environment fit: Mutual understanding and bidirectional adjustment in autistic talent acquisition. *Human Resource Management*, 64(1), 181-199. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22258>
- Dreaver, J., Thompson, C., Girdler, S., Adolfsson, M., Black, M. H., & Falkmer, M. (2020). Success factors enabling employment for adults on the autism spectrum from employers' perspective. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(1), 1657-1667. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03923-3>
- Drewery, D., Eady, M. J., & Li, W. (2026). Six essential elements of high-quality work-integrated learning experiences: A thematic analysis of students' voices. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 14, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.14.11>
- Drewery, D., Nevison, C., Pretti, T. J., Cormier, L., Barclay, S., & Pennaforte, A. (2016). Examining the influence of selected factors on perceived co-op work term quality from a student perspective. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(3), 265-277.
- Eady, M. J., Drewery, D., Burney, M., Li, W., & Livingstone, K. (2025). Students' reflections of quality (RoQ) in work-integrated learning (WIL): A systematic review and framework. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 15(1), 222-239. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-03-2024-0078>

- Emery, A., & Anderman, L. H. (2020). Using interpretive phenomenological analysis to advance theory and research in educational psychology. *Educational Psychologist*, 55(4), 220-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1787170>
- Ezerins, M. E., Simon, L. S., Vogus, T. J., Gabriel, A. S., Calderwood, C., & Rosen, C. C. (2024). Autism and employment: A review of the “new frontier” of diversity research. *Journal of Management*, 50(3), 1102-1144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063231193362>
- Fane, J. (2024). *Making the invisible visible: Neurodivergent students' experiences in Canadian higher education*. The Conference Board of Canada. https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/making-invisible-visible_nov2024.pdf
- Fletcher-Watson, S. (2024). Reporting participatory methods and author positionality in Autism. *Autism*, 28(8), 1869-1871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241266950>
- Garant-Jones, E., Eady, M. J., & Dean, B. A. (2024). Designing for inclusion in work-integrated learning: A scoping review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(8), 1754-1768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2385354>
- Gatto, L. E., Pearce, H., Antonie, L., & Plesca, M. (2021a). Work integrated learning resources for students with disabilities: Are post-secondary institutions in Canada supporting this demographic to be career ready? *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 11(1), 125-143. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-08-2019-0106>
- Gatto, L. E., Pearce, H., Plesca, M., & Antonie, L. (2021b). Students with disabilities: Relationship between participation rates and perceptions of work-integrated learning by disability type. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 22(3), 287-306.
- Godden, L., & Hoessler, C. (2024). (Re)Designing for equity, access and inclusion in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 25(1), 37-50.
- Government of Canada. (2019). *Investing in young Canadians: Budget 2019*. <https://budget.canada.ca/2019/docs/youth-jeunes/youth-jeunes-en.pdf>
- Grandin, T. (2020). Job preparation and how to help people on the spectrum have successful employment. In R. Bedard, & L. Hecker (Eds.), *A spectrum of solutions for clients with autism* (pp. 149-156). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429299391-19>
- Green, J., & Shaughnessy, N. (2023). Autistic phenomenology: Past, present, and potential future. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1287209>
- Hare, J. (2024). *Autism is not a disease: The politics of neurodiversity*. Verso Books.
- Heselton, G. A., Rempel, G. R., & Nicholas, D. B. (2021). Integrating community participation with interpretive phenomenological analysis: Reflections on engaging the autism community. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211055575>
- Holc, S., Yailian, A., Pernon, E., & Baghdadli, A. (2024). Barriers and facilitators to achieving employment in mainstream settings in adults with autism spectrum disorder without intellectual developmental disorders: A scoping review. *L'Encéphale*, 51(1), 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.encep.2024.02.012>
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher positionality - A consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research - A new researcher guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1-10.
- Howard, K., Katsos, N., & Gibson, J. (2019). Using interpretive phenomenological analysis in autism research. *Autism*, 23(7), 1871-1876. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318823902>
- Huffcutt, A. I. (2011). An empirical review of the employment interview construct literature. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 19(1), 62-81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2010.00535.x>
- Huws, J. C., & Jones, R. S. P. (2015). 'I'm really glad this is developmental': Autism and social comparisons—An interpretive phenomenological analysis. *Autism*, 19(1), 84-90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136236131512426>
- Itano-Boase, M., Wijesingha, R., Cukier, W., Latif, R., & Hon, H. (2021). Exploring diversity and inclusion in work-integrated learning: An ecological model approach. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 22(3), 253-269.
- Jackson, D., Dean, B. A., & Eady, M. (2023). Equity and inclusion in WIL: Participation and outcomes for diverse student groups. *Educational Review*, 77(2), 329-350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2182764>
- Jackson, D., Dollinger, M., Gatto, L., Drewery, D., Ajjawi, R., & Fannon, A. M. (2024). Work-integrated learning for students with disabilities: Time for meaningful change. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(7), 1679-1687. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2354242>
- Jacobs, P., Beamish, W., & McKay, L. (2021). Please listen to us: Adolescent autistic girls speak about learning and academic success. *Improving Schools*, 24(3), 196-209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480220973112>
- Janice, M., Bavi, S. S., & Galloway, J. M. (2021). *Insights and strategies to support students with autism spectrum disorder in post-secondary contexts: A Canadian perspective*. Sheridan Institutional Repository.
- Jootun, D., McGhee, G., & Marland, G. R. (2009). Reflexivity: Promoting rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 23(23), 42-46. <https://doi.org/10.7748/ns2009.02.23.23.42.c6800>
- Khan, T. H., Drewery, D., Ademuyiwa, I., Fannon, A. M., & Phillips-Davis, C. (2024). An investigation of barriers experienced by students from equity-deserving groups in a Canadian co-op program. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 25(1), 51-65.
- Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., Williams, J. B., & Löwe, B. (2009). An ultra-brief screening scale for anxiety and depression: The PHQ-4. *Psychosomatics*, 50(6), 613-621. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0033-3182\(09\)70864-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0033-3182(09)70864-3)

- Lai, M. C., & Szatmari, P. (2020). Sex and gender impacts on the behavioural presentation and recognition of autism. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 33(2), 117-123. <https://doi.org/10.1097/YCO.0000000000000575>
- Lawlis, T., Mawer, T., Andrew, L., & Bevitt, T. (2024). Challenges to delivering university health-based work-integrated learning to students with a disability: A scoping review. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(1), 149-165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2228209>
- Lindsay, S., Osten, V., Rezai, M., & Bui, S. (2021). Disclosure and workplace accommodations for people with autism: A systematic review. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 43(5), 597-610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2019.1635658>
- Löwe, B., Kroenke, K., & Gräfe, K. (2005). Detecting and monitoring depression with a two-item questionnaire (PHQ-2). *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 58(2), 163-171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2004.09.006>
- Lucas, R., Cage, E., & James, A. I. (2022). Supporting effective transitions from university to post-graduation for autistic students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(12), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.768429>
- Luey, J. (2014). Participating, navigating and succeeding with autism spectrum disorder in the Ontario postsecondary education system. *College Quarterly*, 17(4), 1-15.
- Mackaway, J. (2022). *Stories of success: Inclusive work-integrated learning (WIL) practices that support diverse learners: ACEN final report*. Australian Collaborative Education Network. <https://acen.edu.au/resources/stories-of-success-inclusive-work-integrated-learning-wil-practices-that-support-diverse-learners/>
- MacLeod, A. (2019). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a tool for participatory research within critical autism studies: A systematic review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 64(1), 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2019.04.005>
- May, B. (2018). *Experiential learning and pathways to employment for Canadian youth: Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities*. House of Commons Canada. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/HUMA/Reports/RP10078738/humarp12/humarp12-e.pdf>
- McLeod, J. D., Meanwell, E., & Hawbaker, A. (2019). The experiences of college students on the autism spectrum: A comparison to their neurotypical peers. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(6), 2320-2336. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-03910-8>
- Milton, D. E. (2010). *The role of reflexivity and ethics in the context of autism studies*. Kent Academic Repository. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/62723/>
- Milton, D. E. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The 'double empathy problem' *Disability & Society*, 27(6), 883-887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.710008>
- Milton, D. E., & Green, J. (2024). Theorising autism. *Autism* 28(4), 795-797. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241235786>
- Moore, L., Foley, S., & Larkin, F. (2024). Understanding the experiences of receiving and providing maternity care for autistic adults: A multi-perspectival interpretative phenomenological analysis study. *Autism*, 29(2), 435-446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613241274518>
- Nicholas, D. B., Mitchell, W., Zulla, R., Solomatin, E., & Qi, S. (2019). A review of CommunityWorks Canada®: Toward employability among high school-age youth with autism spectrum disorder. *Global Pediatric Health*, 6(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333794X19885542>
- Nicolaidis, C., Raymaker, D., Kapp, S. K., Baggs, A., Ashkenazy, E., McDonald, K., Weiner, M., Maslak, J., Hunter, M., & Joyce, A. (2019). The AASPIRE practice-based guidelines for the inclusion of autistic adults in research as co-researchers and study participants. *Autism*, 23(8), 2007-2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319830523>
- O'Neill, C., & Kenny, N. (2023). "I saw things through a different lens...": An interpretative phenomenological study of the experiences of autistic teachers in the Irish education system. *Education Sciences*, 13(7), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070670>
- Patton, E. (2019). Autism, attributions and accommodations: Overcoming barriers and integrating a neurodiverse workforce. *Personnel Review*, 48(4), 915-934. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-04-2018-0116>
- Pearson, A., & Rose, K. (2021). A conceptual analysis of autistic masking: Understanding the narrative of stigma and the illusion of choice. *Autism in Adulthood*, 3(1), 52-60. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.0043>
- Pellicano, E., & den Houting, J. (2022). Annual research review: Shifting from 'normal science' to neurodiversity in autism science. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 63(4), 381-396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13534>
- Pennaforte, A. (2023). Neuro-atypical inclusion: How to support neuro-atypical individuals through work-integrated learning for an inclusive future of work. In K. E. Zegwaard, J. Fleming, & M. Eady (Eds.), *Refereed Proceedings of the 23rd WACE World Conference on Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, 2023, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada*. WACE. <https://waceinc.org/resource/wace-world-conference-2023/>
- Pesonen, H., Waltz, M., Fabri, M., Syurina, E., Krückels, S., Algner, M., Monthubert, B., & Lorenz, T. (2021a). Stakeholders' views on effective employment support strategies for autistic university students and graduates entering the world of work. *Advances in Autism*, 7(1), 16-27. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AIA-10-2019-0035>
- Pesonen, H. V., Waltz, M., Fabri, M., Lahdelma, M., & Syurina, E. V. (2021b). Students and graduates with autism: Perceptions of support when preparing for transition from university to work. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(4), 531-546. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1769982>

- Pfeiffer, B., Braun, K., Kinnealey, M., Derstine Matczak, M., & Polatajko, H. (2017). Environmental factors impacting work satisfaction and performance for adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 47(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3233/IVR-170878>
- Pineo, E. (2022). "But the bumpies hurt!": Autism and the importance of identity-first language. *Including Disability*, 2, 27-60. <https://doi.org/10.51357/id.vi2.194>
- Price, D. (2022). *Unmasking autism: Discovering the new faces of neurodiversity*. Harmony.
- Radulski, E. M. (2022). Conceptualising autistic masking, camouflaging, and neurotypical privilege: Towards a minority group model of neurodiversity. *Human Development*, 66(2), 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000524122>
- Remington, A., Heasman, B., Romualdez, A. M., & Pellicano, E. (2022). Experiences of autistic and non-autistic individuals participating in a corporate internship scheme. *Autism*, 26(1), 201-216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211025115>
- Scheerer, N. E., Boucher, T. Q., Arzanpour, S., Iarocci, G., & Birmingham, E. (2024). Autistic and non-autistic experiences of decreased sound tolerance and their association with mental health and quality of life. *Autism in Adulthood*, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2023.0117>
- Scott, M., Jacob, A., Hendrie, D., Parsons, R., Girdler, S., Falkmer, T., & Falkmer, M. (2017). Employers' perception of the costs and the benefits of hiring individuals with autism spectrum disorder in open employment in Australia. *PloS ONE*, 12(5), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177607>
- Shakespeare, T. (2006). The social model of disability. In L. J. Davis, (Ed.). *The disability studies reader* (pp. 214-221). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203077887>
- Shaughnessy, N., Green, J., Williams, E., Smith, J. A., Tzovaras, B. G., Aitkenhead, G., ... & Buckle, K. L. (2024). Developing a phenomenology of autism. In H. B. Rosqvist, & D. Jackson-Perry (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of research methods and ethics in neurodiversity studies* (pp. 233-255). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66127-3>
- Shinebourne, P. (2011). The theoretical underpinnings of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). *Existential Analysis: Journal of the Society for Existential Analysis*, 22(1), 16-31.
- Smith, J. A. (2004). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research In Psychology*, 1(1), 39-54. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088704qp004oa>
- Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage.
- Spiers, J., & Smith, J. A. (2020). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Spitzer, R. L., Kroenke, K., Williams, J. B., & Löwe, B. (2006). A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder: The GAD-7. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166(10), 1092-1097. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archinte.166.10.1092>
- Stabenow, A., & Anderson, J. (2024). A collaborative disability related accommodations process in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 25(1), 127-140.
- Statistics Canada. (2014). *Graduating in Canada: Profile, labour market outcomes and student debt of the class of 2009-2010*. Government of Canada. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2014/statcan/81-595-m/81-595-m2014101-eng.pdf
- Statistics Canada. (2017). *Autism spectrum disorder: Highlights from the Canadian survey on disability*. Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/infographic-autism-spectrum-disorder-highlights-canadian-survey-disability.html>
- Stetson, L. (2024). Narrative research, reflexivity, and AuDHD lived experiences. In H. B. Rosqvist, & D. Jackson-Perry (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of research methods and ethics in neurodiversity studies* (pp. 279-290). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66127-3>
- Sullivan, J. (2023). 'Pioneers of professional frontiers': The experiences of autistic students and professional work based learning. *Disability & Society*, 38(7), 1209-1230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2021.1983414>
- Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117-125. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2010.0233>
- Thakur, A. (2021, September). *WIL EDI Resource Hub: Identifying barriers and strategies for equitable ways forward in WIL*. Association for Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning. https://acewilbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/formidable/3/Final-Report_final-draft.pdf
- Thom-Jones, S., & Lowe, J. (2024). Innovative and neuro-affirming autistic approaches to autism research. In H. B. Rosqvist, & D. Jackson-Perry, (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of research methods and ethics in neurodiversity studies* (pp. 161-182). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-66127-3>
- Treweek, C., Wood, C., Martin, J., & Freeth, M. (2019). Autistic people's perspectives on stereotypes: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Autism*, 23(3), 759-769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318778286>
- Ugiagbe, I. M., Allan, H. T., Traynor, M., & Collins, L. (2025). Thinking theoretically in nursing research - Positionality and reflexivity in an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study. *Nursing Inquiry*, 32(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12684>

- Underhill, J. C., Clark, J., Hansen, R. S., & Adams, H. (2024). Exploring autistic college students' perceptions and management of peer stigma: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 54(3), 1130-1142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-022-05867-7>
- Vincent, J. (2020). Employability for UK university students and graduates on the autism spectrum: Mobilities and materialities. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 22(1), 12-24. <https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.656>.
- Vincent, J., & Fabri, M. (2022). The ecosystem of competitive employment for university graduates with autism. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education*, 69(5), 1823-1839. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1821874>
- Walker, N. (2021). *Neuroqueer heresies: Notes on the neurodiversity paradigm, autistic empowerment, and postnormal possibilities*. Autonomous Press.
- Wittevrongel, K., Mitchell, W., Hebert, M. L., Nicholas, D. B., & Zwicker, J. D. (2022). Acceptability of employment readiness measures in youth and young adults on the autism spectrum: A mixed-methods study. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 44(16), 4319-4331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2021.1902578>
- Wolpe, S. M. (2024). Promoting success in college: A scoping review of autistic students' postsecondary education experiences. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40489-024-00448-z>
- Wright, P., & Murphy, J. (2022). Cultural humility, a path to equity. In J. B. Leaf, J. H. Cihon, J. L. Ferguson, & P. F. Gerhardt (Eds.), *Handbook of quality of life for individuals with autism spectrum disorder* (pp. 207-222). Springer.. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98507-3_12
- Zeedyk, S. M., Bolourian, Y., & Blacher, J. (2019). University life with ASD: Faculty knowledge and student needs. *Autism*, 23(3), 726-736. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318774148>
- Zegwaard, K. E., & Pretti, T. J. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-42). Routledge.
- Zwicker, J., Zaresani, A., & Emery, J. H. (2017). Describing heterogeneity of unmet needs among adults with a developmental disability: An examination of the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 65(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2017.04.003>

APPENDIX A: Description of study measures and sample descriptive statistics.

Measures

Autism-Spectrum Quotient

Participants completed the Autism-Spectrum Quotient (AQ; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001), a measure of Autistic traits. The AQ is a self-report questionnaire with subscales for social skills, attention switching, attention to detail, communication, and imagination. Respondents complete 50 items using a four-point rating scale (definitely agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, definitely disagree). The AQ total score provides an overall measure of Autistic traits, with higher scores indicating the presence of more Autistic traits. The AQ has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency across subscales ($\alpha = .63 - .77$; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001). In a sample of 205 Autistic and non-Autistic participants, Scheerer et al. (2024) found that the AQ total score has strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$). Participants' AQ total scores were included in the current study to help characterize the sample.

Patient Health Questionnaire-4

The Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4; Kroenke et al., 2009) is a well-established brief self-report measure of anxiety and depression symptoms. The PHQ-4 consists of two items assessing anxiety symptoms (GAD-2; Spitzer et al., 2006) and two items assessing depressive symptoms (PHQ-2; Löwe et al., 2005). Respondents rate the frequency of experiencing these symptoms over the past two weeks using a four-point rating scale (not at all, several days, more than half the days, nearly every day). Total scores can range from 0 to 12 and are characterized descriptively as falling within the normal (0-2), mild (3-5), moderate (6-8), and severe (9-12) ranges. The PHQ-4 has been found to offer a sound measurement of anxiety and depressive symptoms in both clinical and community samples (Caro-Fuentes & Sanabria-Mazo, 2024). Scheerer et al. (2024) found that the PHQ-4 domain scores demonstrate good internal consistency ($\alpha = .79 - .87$) as does the total score ($\alpha = .85$) in a group of Autistic

and non-Autistic adults. Participants in the current study completed the PHQ-4 as a brief measure of current mental well-being.

Work Readiness Inventory

Participants completed the Work Readiness Inventory (WRI; Brady, 2010) as a measure of work readiness. The WRI is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 36 items that address respondents' work readiness concerns, answered using a five-point rating scale (not concerned, a little concerned, somewhat concerned, concerned, very concerned). The WRI measures perceived work readiness across six domains: responsibility, flexibility, skills, communication, self-view, and health and safety. Domain scores can range between 6 and 30 and are characterized descriptively as falling within the not concerned (6), a little concerned (7-12), somewhat concerned (13-18), concerned (19-24), or very concerned (25-30) range. Brady (2010) found that the WRI demonstrates internal consistency across domains in samples of working adults and undergraduate students (Spearman-Brown $r = .73 - .96$; Brown, 2018). Wittevrongel et al. (2022) and Nicholas et al. (2019) found that Canadian Autistic participants had significantly higher WRI domain scores following an employment readiness intervention, supporting the validity of this measure. Additionally, Wittevrongel et al. (2022) found that employment readiness experts who had extensive professional experience in the areas of autism and employment deemed it an acceptable measure to use with this population.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Participants' PHQ-4 total scores fell within the mild to moderate ranges for current anxiety and depressive symptoms. Largely, participants' scores on the WRI domains of work readiness fell within the somewhat concerned to concerned ranges, other than for the health and safety domain, where participants scored within the not concerned to somewhat concerned ranges. The descriptive statistics summarized in Table 3 are presented to characterize the sample and provide a description of the participants represented in this research.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics for age, Autistic traits, depression and anxiety symptoms, and work readiness ($N = 5$).

Variable	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
Age	26.80	4.09	29.00	21.00	30.00
AQ Total	28.50	7.19	30.00	19.00	35.00
Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-4)					
Total Score	5.00	2.00	4.00	3.00	8.00
Anxiety	2.20	1.10	2.00	1.00	4.00
Depression	2.80	1.92	2.00	1.00	6.00
Work Readiness Inventory (WRI)					
Responsibility	15.40	1.95	16.00	13.00	18.00
Flexibility	19.00	2.92	18.00	16.00	23.00
Skills	18.20	3.90	18.00	13.00	22.00
Communication	19.20	4.44	20.00	12.00	24.00
Self-View	21.40	2.70	21.00	18.00	25.00
Health & Safety	8.20	4.97	9.00	1.00	14.00

Note. Age = Participants' age in years; AQ Total = Participants' total score on the Autism-Spectrum Quotient; Total scores on the PHQ-4 are characterized descriptively as falling within the normal (0-2), mild (3-5), moderate (6-8), and severe (9-12) ranges; Domain scores on the WRI are characterized descriptively as falling within the not concerned (6), a little concerned (7-12), somewhat concerned (13-18), concerned (19-24), or very concerned (25-30) ranges.



About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38).*

Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the [WILNZ](#), [WACE](#), [WIL Australia](#), and the [University of Waikato](#).

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL are primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of WIL and, 2) *topical discussion and conceptual* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion including recommendations.

Topical discussion and conceptual articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights into how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, IJWIL seeks manuscripts describing an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or it was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

Reference

Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156420-4>

Supporters





International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning

ISSN: 2538-1032

www.ijwil.org

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

Assoc. Prof. Karsten Zegwaard

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Associate Editors

Dr. Craig Cameron

University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia

Dr. David Drewery

University of Waterloo, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Jenny Fleming

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Assoc. Prof. Sonia Ferns

Curtin University, Australia

Dr. Judene Pretti

University of Waterloo, Canada

Dr. Anna Rowe

University of New South Wales, Australia

Senior Editorial Board Members

Assoc. Prof. Bonnie Amelia Dean

University of Wollongong, Australia

Dr. Phil Gardner

Michigan State University, United States

Assoc. Prof. Kathryn Hay

Massey University, New Zealand

Prof. Denise Jackson

Edith Cowan University, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Ashly Stirling

University of Toronto, Canada

Emeritus Prof. Janice Orrell

Flinders University, Australia

Emeritus Prof. Neil I. Ward

University of Surrey, United Kingdom

Dr. Theresa Winchester-Seeto

University of New South Wales, Australia

Copy Editor

Diana Bushell

International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning

IT Support

Erik van der Gaag

International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning

REVIEW BOARD

Assoc. Prof. Erik Alanson, University of Cincinnati, United States

Assoc. Prof. Martin Andrew, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand

Prof. Dawn Bennett, Curtin University, Australia

Dr. Roelien Brink, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

Mr. Matthew Campbell, University of Queensland, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Clare Dannenberg, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Dr. Julia Caldicott, Southern Cross University, Australia

Prof. Leigh Deves, Charles Darwin University, Australia

Prof. Michelle Eady, University of Wollongong, Australia

Dr. Alon Eisenstein, University of British Columbia, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Chris Eames, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Ms. Anne-Marie Fannon, University of Waterloo, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Wendy Fox-Turnbull, University of Waikato, New Zealand

Dr. Ainsley Goldman, University of Toronto, Canada

Dr. Nigel Gribble, Curtin University, Australia

Prof. Rachael Hains-Wesson, RMIT University, Australia

Dr. Lynette Hodges, Massey University, New Zealand

Dr. Katharine Hoskyn, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Dr. Nancy Johnston, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr. Katie Knapp, University of Waterloo, Canada

Dr. Julian Lee, RMIT University, Australia

Dr. Patricia Lucas, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Dr. Jaqueline Mackaway, Macquarie University, Australia

Prof. Andy Martin, Massey University, New Zealand

Dr. Norah McRae, University of Waterloo, Canada

Dr. Katheryn Margaret Pascoe, University of Otago, New Zealand

Dr. Laura Rook, University of Wollongong, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Philip Rose, Hannam University, South Korea

Dr. Leoni Russell, RMIT, Australia

Dr. Jen Ruskin, Macquarie University, Australia

Dr. Andrea Sator, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr. David Skelton, Eastern Institute of Technology, New Zealand

Assoc. Prof. Calvin Smith, University of Queensland, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Judith Smith, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Dr. Raymond Smith, Griffith University, Australia

Prof. Roger Strasser, Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr. Kylie Taffard, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Prof. Yasushi Tanaka, Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan

Dr. Raewyn Tudor, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Dr. Faith Valencia-Forrester, Charles Sturt University, Australia

Dr. Thai Vu, Curtin University, Australia

Ms. Genevieve Watson, Elysium Associates Pty, Australia

Dr. Nick Wempe, Primary Industry Training Organization, New Zealand

Prof. Chris Winberg, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa

Dr. Karen Young, Deakin University, Australia

Publisher: Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ)

Copyright: CC BY 4.0