European Social Work Education and Practice

Riccardo Guidi
Christian Spatscheck *Editors*

Social Work Practice Education Beyond the Pandemic

Comparative Perspectives on Continuities, Adaptations and Innovations

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Editors

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Foreword

This book grew out of the editors' and authors' efforts to explore the COVID-19 pandemic-related experimentations within social work practice education, the crucial traits of these enduring innovations, and the emerging good practices of cross-fertilization. As the main aim of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) is to support and enhance social work education and practice across Europe, this book provides a great opportunity to readers, academics, and practitioners to understand how both social work education and social work practice have been affected by extreme crisis events such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. The fact that this book has invited contributors with international reputation (i.e., the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) president, and acknowledged academics from the Asia-Pacific region, South Africa, USA, and Europe) and also social work academics who have directly experienced extreme events (i.e., the recent earthquakes in Turkey and the war in Ukraine) makes this book a valuable knowledge resource for social work education and its different aspects.

Case examples from all over the world (Asia-Pacific, Africa, the USA, and Europe) demonstrate how social work education adjusted to new situations in order to address the emerging challenges. Taking this opportunity, social work education developed innovative approaches and methods for teaching and sharing the knowledge to potential social work practitioners who had been students at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the most important topics that has been addressed in almost all the chapters are the efforts to provide social work education with high-quality standards through the use of innovative settings, the introduction of digitalized methods, and the foundation of new partnerships between practice and teaching.

The pandemic did not only indicate the need for remote and blended methods of social work education, it also directed our attention to new paths of supporting people who live in socially and geographically remote areas and have a lack of accessibility to social services. Examples shown in this book include the increased use of tele-mental health for sustaining the resilience of students, remote assessment, hybrid models of intervention, virtual professional development trainings,

and remote supervision by using analyses of case studies in order to keep students aligned to the aims of their social work programs.

Concluding this foreword, it is important to pay particular attention to the fact that strengthening students' resilience is one of the irreplaceable elements of social work education, thanks to which students can apply their acquired knowledge in demanding social work practice and uncertain realities. Enhancing students' resilience, especially during times of extreme crisis events, contributes to the enlargement of the professional role and identity of social workers.

Altogether, reading this book can enlarge the understanding of the impacts of extreme events on social work education and creative responses. Through the different case examples across the globe, it illustrates how social work educators utilized innovative methods for knowledge development in order to maintain the core social work values and principles within social work education and social work practice in challenging contexts.

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Acknowledgments

An important starting point for this book was the European Conference of Social Work Education (ECSWE) 2021 that was hosted by Tallinn University with the topic of "Innovation and Resilience: Preparedness of Social Work Education in Uncertain Times." Several of the authors of the chapters of this book met there and discussed the impacts of the pandemic and other crisis events on social work education. The changes, challenges, and innovations seemed especially to be relevant for social work practice education. This led to the foundation of the international research project "SWooPEd—Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemic, and beyond. Continuities, Changes and Innovations in Europe" that could create an international research group that has been working together over the last three years. We really thank the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) for the financial support received in the context of the "EASSW Call for Projects."

We had a significant opportunity to discuss some research results of the project in the Symposium "European Social Work Practice Education during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and beyond" at the European Conference of Social Work Education (ECSWE) 2023 in Porto/Matosinhos. We thank all the contributors for the presentations and discussion.

For this book, we then could gain both authors from the European SWooPEd research group and authors from other continents. This enlarged our reflections and analyses on the changes and innovations that have been emerging around the pandemic and other crisis events and that will last on for future times and other similar situations. We would like to thank all the colleagues that have been involved in these activities. Especially their active contributions, constructive cooperation, enthusiasm, and patience kept our common research activities together and running. The results are now assembled and accessible in the texts of this book. We are very happy to present them to the readers.

Riccardo moved the first steps of this book still at the Department of Political Science of the University of Pisa where he studied and worked for 25 years and finished the editorial work then at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Florence. Hence, the publication of this book gives Riccardo the

opportunity to thank the Department of Political Science of the University of Pisa and all the colleagues for the beautiful and productive years who could be spent there together.

Christian thanks his colleagues at the Faculty of Social Sciences and at the School of Social Work of Hochschule Bremen, City University of Applied Sciences, for their ongoing support and constructive collaboration in the manifold common activities around social work research and education over the last years. Many of these events were only possible together and he is looking forward to further common projects.

Florence, Italy — Riccardo Guidi
Bremen, Germany — Christian Spatscheck

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About the Editors

Riccardo Guidi is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Florence, Italy. He holds a BA/MA in Political Science (Sociology curriculum) and a PhD in History and Sociology of Modernity. In the last ten years he has taught Social Policy and Policy Practice for Helping Professions, Organization of Social Services, Sociology of the Third Sector, Sociology, and Methodology of Applied Social Research. Previously at the University of Pisa, he was Scientific Coordinator of Practice Education activities in BA/MA Social Work Programs from 2019 to 2023. He is Co-Convener (with Prof. Idit Weiss-Gal and Prof. John Gal) of the Special Interest Group "Research on Social Work and Policy Engagement" of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA). In the last years he has been Principal Investigator of the project: "Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemic, and Beyond: Continuities, Changes, Innovations in Europe" (co-funded by the EASSW). His investigations are mainly about Social Policy and Social Work, Third Sector, Volunteering, and Civic Action.

Christian Spatscheck is Professor of Theories and Methods of Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Hochschule Bremen, City University of Applied Sciences, Germany. He is a qualified social worker (Dipl.-Soz.-arb. FH, KFH Freiburg) and holds a diploma in pedagogy (Dipl.-Paed., postgraduate level, PH Freiburg) and a PhD in social pedagogy (TU Berlin). He is member of Editorial Board of the *European Journal of Social Work* and International Editorial Advisory Board of Nordic Social Work Research. He is also an elected member of the Board of Directors of the DGSA (The German Association of Social Work)—German Association of Social Work and one of the two Chairpersons of the DGSA. During the last years, he has published several monographs, edited volumes, and articles on theories and methods of social work with a special focus on spatial, systemic, and socio-ecological approaches of social work and social pedagogy. He has developed international activities at Lund University, Pisa University, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, UCL Institute of Education, Hanzehogeschool Groningen, and MCI Innsbruck, and has been teaching in many member universities of the European SocNet98 network.

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Chapter 1
Social Work Practice Education and the Pandemic: An Introduction

Riccardo Guidi and Christian Spatscheck

1.1 Background of the Book

The basic impulse for this book started in 2021—in the middle of the pandemic—at the (virtual) European Conference of Social Work Education (ECSWE) 2021 "Innovation and Resilience: Preparedness of Social Work Education in Uncertain Times" organized by the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) and Tallinn University. In several sessions, the authors of this book focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other similar crisis events on social work education and discussed what we could learn from them. This satisfied the need to address the pandemic, its impacts and legacies for social work education within a comparative international framework. In those discussions, "social work practice education" (IASSW-IFSW, 2020: 13)—the sphere of social work education most connected to the daily life of social service organizations and professionals—received special attention.

Out of these considerations, the international project "*SWooPEd—Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemics, and Beyond. Continuities, Changes and*

The article originates from a strong and ongoing collaboration between the authors. However, as some assessment processes require formal attribution, Riccardo Guidi can be considered the author of Sects. 1.2, 1.3.2, 1.4, and Christian Spatscheck of Sects. 1.1, 1.3.1, and 1.5.

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Innovations in Europe"—emerged (see below for details). In the context of that project, we regarded the COVID-19 pandemic as a massive and existential social, political and health-related crisis event with complex dimensions and tremendous impacts at the local, national and global levels. At the same time, the pandemic was not a singular event, but instead it can serve as a more general example for other similar crisis events with a transgressive character, whether environmental or technical catastrophes and disasters, extreme weather events, food crises, military conflicts and war, terrorism or other situations that lead to general states of emergency and existential and traumatic impacts on collective and individual levels (Dominelli, 2023; Bartoli et al., 2022; Alston et al., 2019; Wong, 2018; or for the climate crisis, also Dominelli, 2012, 2018; Erickson, 2018; Böhnisch, 2019; Pfaff et al., 2022). Against this backdrop, the pandemic needs to be regarded as a drastic and historic event. However, it might also serve as a case for the reflection and better understanding of other larger societal and collective crises with comparable dimensions and challenges in the present and near future.

In the following sections, the main outlines and long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic as well its general impacts on social work practice education will be described. After that, we will illustrate the main ideas, key concepts and main contexts of this book. Finally, we will present the book's structure.

1.2 The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Long-Term Consequences

On March 11, 2020, after 118,000 cases of COVID-19 in 114 countries and over 4000 deaths, the UN World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared that it was characterizing COVID-19 as a pandemic. After over 3 years, 765 million cases, 7 million deaths, and 13 billion vaccine doses, on May 5, 2023 WHO declared the end of COVID-19 as a public health emergency.

Such a dramatic and global event can neither be forgotten nor left behind. We all remember the issues and fears related to the virus transmission, the infections, their consequences, and the deaths that were sometimes very close to us. Indeed, we all remember the restrictive measures adopted by governments to prevent or contrast virus transmission, from the facemasks to the lockdowns, from the blocking of activities to social distancing.

Beyond restrictive safety measures and public health interventions, national governments also adopted social policy measures. Especially in 2020, social policy responses were fundamental to managing the crisis and mitigating its impact on household finances. Unlike the policy reaction to the 2008 financial crisis, governments massively used deficit spending to support workers' and enterprises' economic conditions without challenging core capitalist institutions (Beland et al. 2021).

Although governments' measures contributed to coping with the worst effects of the pandemic, its impacts on individuals and societies have been multiple and long-lasting. Beyond the immediate health consequences, especially in some countries,

COVID-19 and restrictive measures were so harsh and long that they have affected mental health to the extent of being intended as a source of trauma (Amerio et al., 2021; Rossi et al., 2021). Worldwide, the long-term effects of the pandemic on the mental health of children and adolescents have been particularly serious and worrying (Samji et al., 2022). The possible consequences on various aspects of the economy also appear relevant and long-lasting, like the endurance of small businesses (Belitski et al., 2021) or the increasing presence of organized crime in the formal economy (Siegel et al. 2022). Moreover, the educational losses were also remarkable, especially for the children of disadvantaged parents (Blaskó, 2021; Kaffenberger, 2021; Fuchs-Schündeln et al., 2022). Although social policy measures contributed to coping with the worst socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, COVID-19 clearly increased social inequalities (Wachtler et al., 2020). The pandemic made it clearly visible that we need increased solidarity and more resilient communities and societies. However, a broader general public debate on care and caring societies with a global perspective only gained a smaller increase during the pandemic (Bitzan et al., 2022). This debate still needs to continue to reach the wider aims and visions of a socio-ecological sustainability and global justice (Spatscheck et al., 2020; Böhnisch, 2019; Pfaff et al., 2022).

1.3 COVID-19, Social Work Practice and Social Work Practice Education

1.3.1 Social Work Practice in the Pandemic

Social work practice was significantly affected by the pandemic. During the pandemic, all social workers certainly experienced the challenge of "staying close, while maintaining social distancing" (Devlieghere & Roose, 2020) as well as the manifold challenges for their often vulnerable target groups and the organizational, public and technical limitations to their professional agency. At the same time, it is still not very easy to summarize the often very complex impacts of the pandemic on social work practice. There remains a lack of systematic knowledge and studies with a more comparative international perspective.

Evidence from different countries shows that social workers were called to address old and new social needs during the pandemic by often adopting new modalities and instruments in an unprecedented scenario where their personal health was at risk (de Jonge et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2021). Despite not being entirely new, the daily use of ICT was a real novelty, and it remains today one of the main legacies of the pandemic (Pink et al., 2022; Ashcroft et al., 2022). Related to the use of ICT in the relationships with the service users, social workers had to face unprecedented ethical challenges (Banks et al., 2020).

Some available studies show that service users—children and adolescents, adults, older people, or the disabled—were often among the most affected groups during the pandemic (Aghamiri et al., 2022). Some of the main topics of

systematically edited volumes in Germany (Lutz et al., 2021a, b; Aghamiri et al., 2022) or the United Kingdom (Turner, 2021) show that there were tremendous impacts on subjective lifeworlds, life conditions, social cohesion, individual coping and sense-making, loneliness, basic provision, access to services, challenges of digitalization and digitality as well as discontent with science, democracy and an increase of right-wing populism. The pandemic has worked like a social catalyst for many of the already available developments in nearly all of these fields. Ottmann and Noble (2023) illustrate the impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable groups among case studies in very different societies. This book highlights the tension between Western societies, the Global South and Indigenous peoples, as well as the need for a global understanding and a critical postcolonial and intersectional perspective.

Facing these different dimensions, the pandemic needs to be characterized as a challenge to maintain "the social itself" that had to be maintained by the vulnerable target groups as well as the social work profession under increasing tensions (Aluffi Pentini & Lorenz, 2022). It would certainly be desirable to gain further systematic and empirical knowledge on the impact of the pandemic in the different social work practice contexts. However, one general guideline and tenor for our book already becomes visible: the dimensions and impacts of the pandemic can only be understood if it is regarded in its broader social and political dimensions in relation to the institutions and organizations involved, as well as the perspectives, rights and needs of the addressees and the standards of the social work profession (Garrett, 2021; Lutz et al., 2021a).

1.3.2 Social Work Education in the Pandemic

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work education was so strong that it was described in terms of a "tsunami" or "shock" (Mclaughlin et al., 2020; Wallengren-Lynch et al., 2021). Worldwide, during the first months of 2020, universities converted their in-presence activities into remote ones. This shift was often swift and destabilizing for the personal and professional lives of lecturers, instructors, and students. The isolation and dramatic loss of physical connections, an increasingly difficult work-life balance, and the spread of uncertainty, fear and anxiety were often coupled with increasing digital divides and the threats of demotivation in learning, decreasing quality of education and delays in students' careers.

However, the global community of social work education did not witness the events passively. During the pandemic, lecturers, educators and field instructors mobilized a significant amount of material, social and cognitive energies to adapt social work education to the new situation and create new modalities that gave the students the best possible learning opportunities (e.g., O'Keeffe et al., 2023; Fronek et al., 2023). In the introduction of N.25 of *Social Dialogue—The International Magazine of the International Association of Schools of Social Work*—which

reported some of the experiences of social work education during the pandemic—Wallengren-Lynch et al. (2021) highlighted:

> The creativity and compassionate action that educators from different part of the globe have undertaken in reaching beyond the university's walls and into the community. It exemplifies adaptive pedagogies that help students foster critical perspectives whilst sitting in online settings.

Beyond the evident criticalities, the resilience of the global community of social work education was clear from the very beginning of the pandemic, as well as documented in the case studies from different continents published in Autumn 2020 (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Morley & Clarke, 2020; O'Rourke et al., 2020; Fargion et al., 2020; Azman et al., 2020). Importantly, the new regulations, adaptive pedagogies, and creative approaches—which affected all aspects of social work education and implied a systematic use of the ICT—generated "a new normality" for education that was expected to shape the new post-pandemic normality (Xie et al., 2020).

1.4 Main Concepts and Aims of This Book

With these premises, this book focuses on the conditions, impacts, challenges, innovations, new methods, and settings for social work practice education arising from the pandemic.

1.4.1 Social Work Education: Past, Present, and the Pandemic

As researchers, lecturers or instructors, we might be particularly interested in addressing how the long-term characteristics interplay with the recent adaptations and experimentations and shape social work education in the aftermath of the pandemic (Fig. 1.1). To expand our knowledge and understanding about social work education, the following questions seem relevant:

- Can we review adaptations and experimentations of social work education during the pandemic beyond mere anecdotes?
- What were the crucial characteristics and outputs of the most relevant initiatives?
- Did they effectively contribute to coping with the impacts of the pandemic? If so, how?
- What remains—or should be kept—from those initiatives for today?
- How can and should the results be used to contribute to and reshape current social work education?

Although we mainly focus on innovation, we should avoid naïve, ahistorical, and decontextualized conceptions of progress and change (Brand & Wissen, 2017;

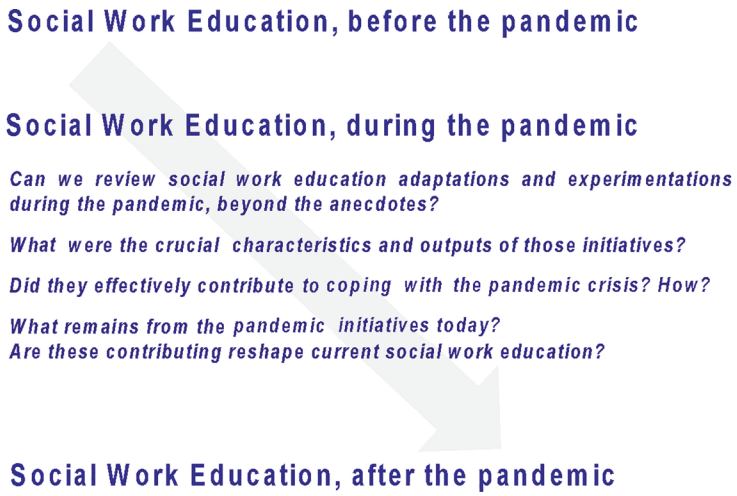

Fig. 1.1 Basic approach of the book. (Source: The authors)

Sommer & Welzer, 2017). The resilience within the global community of social work education during the pandemic as well as its ordinary actions significantly depend on the specific historical, institutional and epistemological contexts where the schools act. This is not new for social work: although its basic traits are common worldwide, social work is embedded in the peculiar context where it has been established and developed over time (Campanini & Frost, 2004).

Our comparative study on the impacts of the pandemic on social work practice education is thus characterized by a diachronic perspective that remains closely connected with the pre-pandemic, the pandemic, and the post-pandemic scenarios (Fig. 1.1).

1.4.2 Our Special Focus: Social Work Practice Education

In this book, we direct the attention to a specific and crucial area of social work education, namely "social work practice education," also known as supervised placements, field education, field instruction, etc. (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 13). Social work practice education means a supervised learning phase for social work students with direct practice contact in the role of a social worker within practical and institutional social work settings, in connection with the social work study program and guided along the main professional values and standards of social work (Taplin & Beesley, 2023; Barretti, 2004; Miller, 2013).

Social work practice education needs to be a key component of every social work curriculum. It is regarded as essential for developing the role and identity of a social work professional in the context of real tasks and demands (IASSW & IFSW, 2020,

p. 18). It prepares students with the necessary knowledge, values, and skills for ethical, competent and effective practice (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 13). Therefore, the duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities in practice education must be sufficient and well accompanied to ensure that students are well prepared for professional practice.

In the architecture of this book, social work practice education exemplifies, at best, both the peculiarities of social work education and its challenges during the pandemic. On the one hand, practice education is so important for social work education that it is considered its 'signature pedagogy' (CSWE, 2008; Wayne, 2010). Practice education is a key requirement within the tertiary-level social work programs to ground and exert a "practice-based profession" like social work (IFSW, 2014).

On the other hand, providing students with opportunities for practice education was probably the most radical challenge for social work education during the pandemic. Indeed, practice education is embedded in, shaped by and dependent on social workers' actual organizations and daily activities with a higher relational intensity than other educational activities (e.g., lectures and seminars). The paradoxical challenge and dilemma for the global social work education community was to provide social work students with the opportunities to learn practice skills that require face-to-face relations and field activities. At the same time, exactly these were not allowed or seriously limited due to the restrictions of the pandemic. In the specific field of practice education, innovation and resilience required much more than the shift to in-remote lessons. Social work students, practice supervisors, and mentors had to find new and unprecedented strategies for this task (Sewell et al. 2023).

1.4.3 Our Perspective: Developing Comparative Analyses and Cross-Fertilization for Social Work Education

Although the pandemic was a global phenomenon, different countries experienced differing intensities of the contagion and adopted different measures to cope with it. Moreover, social work (education) depends highly on context (i.e., place and time). Beyond this, the characteristics of social work practice education are very strongly differentiated by countries and regions, as well as the different schools or universities. For these reasons, addressing our research question requires a comparative analysis.

Although international social work is growing and considered a crucial perspective for SW research, comparative studies in this field are still particularly weak (Beck & Hämäläinen, 2022; Hämäläinen, 2014; Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2007). In this book, we will adopt a specific social work approach (Meeuwisse & Swärd, 2007) to a comparative analysis of adaptations and experimentations in practice education during the pandemic. We will mainly focus on European countries, but we will also

consider the experiences from Africa, Asia and Pacific, and the USA. Europe is a good reference for comparative analysis because it is a small, highly differentiated, and loosely integrated continent. It includes several welfare regimes and social work traditions and comprises different reaction strategies to the pandemic.

1.4.4 Context and the Purpose of This Book: A Synthesis

All of these considerations constituted the background of the European Project "SWooPEd—Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemic, and Beyond. Continuities, Changes, Innovations in Europe" (December 2021–December 2022). The project was funded by EASSW through the 'Small Projects' initiative in September 2021. SwooPEd involved 12 countries and 13 universities: University of Pisa (Leading partner; Principal investigator: Riccardo Guidi), University of Bucharest (Florin Lazăr), CIES-ISCTE (Jorge Ferreira), Complutense University of Madrid (Iria de la Fuente Roldán), Hochschule Bremen (Christian Spatscheck), HoGhent (Femke Dewulf, Nicole Vanhoucke), Maltepe University (Neşe Şahin Taşğın, Kübranur Görmüş, Gökçesu Akşit Dudaklı), Masaryk University (Roman Baláž, Monika Punová), Matej Bel University (Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová), University of Milan-Bicocca (Paolo Rossi), Østfold University College (Bengt Morten Wenstøb), University of Sussex (Henglien Lisa Chen), and Taras Shevchenko University (Olena Chuiko, Valentyna Shkuro). Anca Mihai was the Research Assistant for the project.

The project's basic aim was to give the European schools of social work the chance to know, exchange and cross-fertilize the crucial traits of the multiple adaptations, experimentations, and enduring innovations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Five crucial activities were developed: an initial background country analysis, an international online survey on practice education activities in 2020–2021 through a common questionnaire to the schools of social work, and two webinars with presentations, analyses, and discussions about the different practice education activities in Europe in 2020–2021. After the end of the project, a symposium was carried out within ECSWE held in Porto/Matosinhos in June 2023, and this book was prepared. Following the contents of one of the sections of the second webinar of the project, an extra-European perspective was added to the book.

The book identifies and summarizes the new initiatives in the field of practice education that were developed by the schools of social work during the pandemic. It offers unprecedented knowledge about how social work practice education was restructured under the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and how the adaptations and experimentations generated during this time have become a supplementary tool of current social work education in many areas of the world. Beyond providing the readers with systematic knowledge about the new practices in Europe and beyond, the book allows the global social work education community to understand how they are currently interplaying with long-term characteristics to shape present and future social work (practice) education.

The book addresses these questions through a "glocal" approach, from a comparative perspective, and with a multi-method design. It adopts the IASSW-IFSW "Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training" (IASSW-IFSW, 2020) and considers the heterogeneity of national social work education systems in Europe, North America, Africa and the Asia and Pacific region. This book is intended to be an inspiring source for all the innovators in the field of higher education in social work. It highlights how social work practice education can be designed more resilient and sustainably, directing social work practice education into the future.

1.5 Structure of This Book

The book is divided into three parts. The first part compares the structures and designs of social work practice education programs and the reactions of the schools of social work to the COVID-19-related restrictive measures at the European level in three chapters. Chapter 2 by Christian Spatscheck, Henglien Lisa Chen and Roman Baláž describes the design and main results of the qualitative background analysis of SWooPEd, which compares the main qualities and impacts of the pandemic on social work practice education in 12 European countries and collects the main examples of innovative strategies and responses the challenges of the pandemic in these settings. Chapter 3 by Florin Lazăr, Riccardo Guidi, Anca Mihai and Kübranur Görmüş displays and discusses the design and the main results of the European survey on conditions, impacts and coping strategies within social work practice education during and beyond the pandemic that was developed and carried out within the SWooPEd project. Chapter 4 by Femke Dewulf, Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová and Bengt Morten Maximilian Wenstøb assembles and reflects the main findings on temporary adjustments and longer-lasting innovations that have been identified and discussed during the workshops of SWooPEd.

The second part of the book provides in-depth analyses of how the pandemic experimentations have been carried out in some European countries, where innovations and findings could be identified and integrated into current social work education. In Chap. 5, Iria Noa de la Fuente Roldán reports on innovative curricular practices in social work programs in Spain and evaluates them for future use in other settings. In Chap. 6, Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová summarizes the long-lasting innovations for social work practice education through service-learning in virtual environments in the Slovak Republic. In Chap. 7, Gökçesu Akşit Dudaklı observes the changes in rules and guidelines for social work practice education during and after the pandemic. In Chap. 8, Olena Chiuko, Valentyna Shkuro and Tetiana Semigina report on insights on continuities and innovative strategies of social work practice education in the Ukraine, where the need to cope with the pandemic was directly followed by the need to survive and cope with the impacts of the Russian occupation. In Chap. 9, Giovanni Cellini and Riccardo Guidi describe the programs, experimentations and their longer-lasting values of Italian social work programs. In

Chap. 10, Monika Punová reflects on how the pandemic became a starting point for the development of models that can now be characterized as resilience-based social practice education in the Czech Republic. In Chap. 11, Michelle Mittmann and Adrian Roeske consider the (im)possibilities of deriving general recommendations for digitally supported settings for social work practice education from a German perspective.

The third part of the book displays paths and analyses from schools in non-European countries. In Chap. 12, Darla Spence Coffey and Deana F. Morrow summarize the lessons learned from the pandemic from a US perspective. In Chap. 13, David Rose, Jowima Ang-Reyes and Mohd Haizzan Yahaya reflect on the recent history, responses to the pandemic and the future perspectives of social work practice education within the Asia-Pacific region. In Chap. 14, Varoshini Nadesan describes the recent history and current social work practice education approaches in South Africa.

Chapter 15 closes the book with a concluding chapter by Annamaria Campanini, Riccardo Guidi and Christian Spatscheck that interprets the results, findings, and experiences from the book in relation to the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training and summarizes current and future challenges of social work practice education.

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Part I
European Social Work Practice Education in Times of the Pandemic and Beyond: The Big Picture

Chapter 2
Social Work Practice Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Europe: A Comparison of Qualitative Analyses of Conditions, Responses, and Innovations from Twelve Countries

Christian Spatscheck, Henglien Lisa Chen, and Roman Baláž

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the design and changes in social work practice education in different European countries during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the "Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training" co-published by the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers, social work practice education is described as an integrated and supervised learning phase that allows social work students to experience direct practice contact in the role of a social worker (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 13). This activity is embedded in practical and institutional social work settings, is organized in connection with a social work study program, and needs to be guided along the main professional values and standards of social work (Taplin & Beesley, 2023; Barretti, 2004; Miller, 2013). Synonyms for the term "social work practice education" in different countries include "supervised placements," "field education," and "field instruction" (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 13).

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Social work practice education is a critical component of the social work curriculum, providing professional socialization of social work students to develop them into social work professionals (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 18). Social work practice education prepares students with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary for ethical, competent, and effective practice (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, p. 13). Therefore, the duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities in practice education must be sufficient to ensure that students are prepared for professional practice.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on social work education, particularly in the area of practice education. As a general crisis event, the pandemic led to states of emergency and had traumatic impacts at both the collective and individual levels (Dominelli, 2012, 2018; Erickson, 2018; Böhnisch, 2019; Pfaff et al., 2022). As a result, restrictions on mobility and social interaction have led to the cancellation, postponement, and early termination of social work practice education on a global scale. In response, accrediting bodies, social work education faculties, and industry partner agencies both within and across countries have had to rapidly adapt their approaches to how placements are conceptualized and provided (O'Keeffe et al., 2023). It can be argued that the pandemic has presented opportunities for reflecting on our responses and exploring new possibilities in practice education in a post-COVID-19 world (Fronek et al., 2023).

This chapter includes a qualitative comparison study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work practice education across 12 countries located in diverse regions of Europe, including central and eastern Europe (i.e., Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania), Northern Europe (i.e., Norway), Southern Europe (i.e., Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey), and Western Europe (i.e., Belgium, Germany, England). This study is part of a one-year (2021–22) mixed methods international research project titled "Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemics, and Beyond: Continuities, Changes, Innovations in Europe," which was funded by EASSW and focuses on the continuities, multiple adaptations, experimentations, and enduring innovations during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants in the study were social work academics who had close contact with social work practice education during the pandemic. The research group started as a core group of scholars who identified a common interest in gaining more systematic knowledge on the topic. To obtain a broader and more representative picture, they invited other researchers from the different regions of Europe. As a result, the research group was able to assemble perspectives from 13 universities in 12 countries, represented by the individuals in parentheses: University of Pisa (Riccardo Guidi, leading partner and principal investigator, now working at University of Florence), University of Bucharest (Florin Lazăr), CIES-ISCTE (Jorge Ferreira), Complutense University of Madrid (Iria de la Fuente Roldán), Hochschule Bremen (Christian Spatscheck), HoGhent (Femke Dewulf, Nicole Vanhoucke), Maltepe University (Neşe Şahin Taşğın, Kübranur Görmüş, Gökçesu Akşit Dudaklı), Masaryk University (Roman Baláž, Monika Punová), Matej Bel University (Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová), University of Milan-Bicocca (Paolo Rossi), Østfold University College (Bengt Morten Wenstøb), University of Sussex (Henglien Lisa Chen), and Taras Shevchenko University (Olena Chuiko, Valentyna Shkuro).

With this selection, the study focused on the perspectives and experiences of social work researchers and lecturers who could offer direct insights and experiences regarding social work practice education during the pandemic. The perspectives of students, social work practice partners, and service users could only be integrated in a mediated way and therefore were not the main focus of this study. It would certainly be of further interest to integrate these broader perspectives in further studies. However, given the time constraints and limited access, this study was deliberately designed to focus on the perspectives of social work scholars.

This chapter explores the main results of the participating academics' reconstruction of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work practice education across the 12 involved countries. The study addresses the following questions:

- How can diverse social work education systems be understood and characterized in comparison with each other?
- What were the main impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on social work practice education in the countries studied?
- What were the key responses to the COVID-19 pandemic regarding social work practice education in the countries studied?

2.2 Methodology

Various political and societal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly impacted social work education around Europe during and after the pandemic, particularly in practice education. In this context, a comparative cross-national perspective contributes by providing a way of looking with "fresh eyes," offering new perspectives and generating new ideas.

The main data of this study were structured expert background reports provided by participating social work scholars from 12 countries. Content analysis and limit-type methodology were applied to analyze the reports. Limit types enable the description of extreme points on the boundary of a constructed phenomenon. However, our analysis also identified various trends between the extreme points of the identified phenomena.

A collaborative approach was chosen for the study, bringing together different stakeholder groups to improve the outcomes and legitimacy of the research (Jasanoff, 2004). This approach aims to overcome longstanding antagonisms and power asymmetries between groups from different regional backgrounds. Hence, the study compared the expert background reports to foster iterative, deliberative negotiation, build shared understanding, and develop knowledge jointly in the research process. To this end, a four-step model was chosen.

First, all the social work academics from the 12 involved countries produced their individual country background reports based on their national and local sources and their work experiences. Specifically, they reported on the following: (i) how social work education and its practice education is delivered in their countries, (ii)

how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted practice education, and (iii) the institutional response and changes to social work practice education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, we applied content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) to identify patterns across the 12 country background reports. These patterns were identified using the limit-type analytical concept (Gregor, 1988). When deciding on this approach, we addressed a concern raised by Silverman (2005) regarding the problem of inconsistent categorization of patterns in non-robust data. Since we had only country background reports and no chance to pose further questions or obtain more data, we needed to address this limitation, hence our selection of the limit-type method as proposed by Gregor (1988). From this perspective, each constructed phenomenon can be seen as a naturally unbounded set, akin to a cloud in the mind of a researcher with varying expanses. The data reveals different dimensions within this cloud, and the task of a researcher is to identify and examine these dimensions along with their associated limit types in the data. Describing the limit types of these dimensions allowed us to unveil the constructed reality, which encompasses various individual interpretations existing in the described limit types both within a given dimension and across different dimensions.

In line with Krippendorff (2013), our approach involved three key steps: (i) a thorough review of the country background reports, (ii) the development and application of codes to classify content related to COVID-19 responses, and (iii) an analysis of this coded data using the limit type approach. Through this method, we aimed to chart the range of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as delineated by the authors in the country reports. Some countries are not explicitly listed in our analysis, as they fall within the spectrum between these limits. Consequently, our analysis captures a diverse array of trends spanning the spectrum between the extremes of identified practices and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of social work education.

Third, we engaged with the authors of the country background reports through plenary meetings to gather and address feedback on our joint analysis, the findings of the content analysis, and the identified limit types.

Fourth, we expanded our engagement to include a wider range of stakeholders, including accrediting bodies, social work education faculties, and industry partner agencies from the countries studied. We conducted two interactive webinars (detailed in Chaps. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) to gather and address their feedback on our analysis and findings. The study received ethics approval from the University of Pisa in Italy, where the principal investigator was then located.

Before presenting our main findings, suggestions for further research, and outlook, it is important to note that this comparative study does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of these topics. The study did not aim to judge whether one country's practices are "better" than another's or to assume that any identified regulations, measures, responses, or innovations can simply be transplanted from one country to another. Instead, the research sought to consider what lessons can be learned from the diverse responses in practice education to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Main Findings

The first result was that there are very different terminologies and concepts around the traditions and approaches involved in social work practice education in the compared countries. Hence, it was of crucial importance to clarify mutual understanding and to find a shared terminology for the project. For example, the term "social work practice education" was described using terms like "internship," "placement," "field education," "practice phase," and "practice education." Similarly, the reports referred to the responsible higher education institution using terms such as "university," "school," "faculty," "program," and "course," and to the involved actors with titles such as "practice supervisor," "academic supervisor," "supervisor," "tutor," and "mentor." Understanding that international comparisons of social work need to stay open to local differences (see Borrmann et al., 2007), concepts, and terminologies, we agreed to keep the diversity of terms, only unifying the term "social work practice education" according to the criteria of the Global Standards of Social Work Education (IASSW & IFSW, 2020).

A second general insight was that in all 12 countries, social work practice education is a mandatory part of social work education, whose specific design is mostly locally governed between the individual university and their local practice partners. Nonetheless, the study revealed many similarities and patterns across the countries around the conditions and characteristics of social work practice education, the developments during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impacts on social work practice education.

2.3.1 The Conditions and Characteristics of Social Work Practice Education

To gain a broader understanding of the main influential factors of social work practice education, we first had to compare the different frameworks of social work practice education in the participating countries. This comparison showed that in regard to the social work practice education regulations (including standards, rules, and guidance), *England, Germany, Slovakia, and Romania* follow centrally structured social work practice education phases that are monitored by national or regional social work associations or social work education associations, whereas in *Italy, Belgium, Portugal, and Ukraine*, social work practice education seems to be more flexibly regulated. In these latter countries, social work practice education is mainly organized by the academic faculties, and professional guidelines have more of a recommendation rather than a strictly binding character. This enables social work practice education to more flexibly follow current trends in society and developments among the involved organizations, groups, and individuals. Aside from the varying degrees of regulatory strictness, all participating practice organizations experienced the challenge of maintaining standards during the pandemic and the

need to open new possibilities and create uncommon solutions through more flexible use of rules, standards, duration, and space.

Using limit type analysis, we can observe a spectrum of different grades of formalization of social work practice education, as summarized in Fig. 2.1.

Both the length and time points of social work practice education differ between countries within a greater spectrum. In *Germany*, the practice phase is mostly included in the last third of the BA degree, and in some federal states, additional practice semesters may be required after obtaining a degree. In *Italy*, social work practice education is integrated in both the first and third years of a BA degree, with the activities varying depending on the year. In *England*, a practice phase called "first placement" consists of 7.5 h/day for 70 working days, whereas "second placement" consists of 100 working days that involve a higher-level role and more demanding tasks. In *Turkey*, students attend social work practice education in their seventh or eighth semester. In *Norway*, the length of social work practice education is 24 weeks and takes place in the fourth to fifth semesters. In *Spain*, the length of the social work practice education phase is between 450 and 540 h, and the timing depends on how faculties organize it. In *Slovakia*, the length of social work practice education is at least 180 h. In *Romania*, social work practice education consists of a minimum of 90 h (either during the fourth semester or at the end of the year, for 3 weeks) up to a maximum of 400–700 h. In *Ukraine*, the average length of social work practice education consists of 3–16% of study credits (7.2–38.4 credits for a BA degree and 3.6–19.2 credits for an MA degree). For *Belgium, Turkey, the Czech Republic,* and *Portugal*, the reports did not specify the length of the social work practice education at the national level. In *Belgium*, social work practice education is historically divided into the three "classic" social work approaches of casework, group work, and community work, which may occur at different time points within

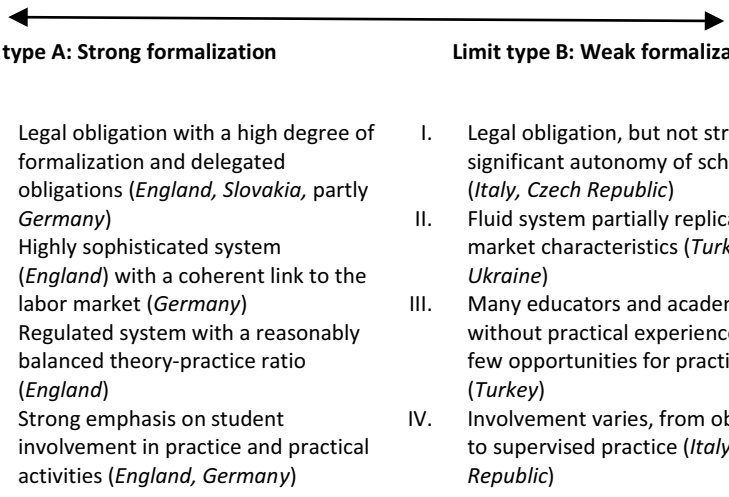

Fig. 2.1 Spectrum of different grades of formalization in social work practice education. (Source: The authors)

a BA course. In the *Czech Republic*, social work practice education is preceded by field trips in which students learn about the actual functioning of social service organizations.

Summarizing these rather diverse forms of regulations, the different countries might be grouped into two categories based on the timing of attendance and the types of activities involved in social work practice education. This categorization is shown in Table 2.1.

In regard to supervisory guidance and support during the social work practice education phase, most of the studied countries have social work practice supervisors within the social work faculties and/or from the hosting practice organizations to support students during their practice activities (e.g., *Italy, Germany, Czech Republic, Portugal, Spain, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine*).[1]

2.3.2 The Main Effects of Public COVID-19 Responses on Social Work Practice Education

In the second part of the country reports, we asked the authors to collect and display the main effects of COVID-19 policies on social work practice education. This section aimed to identify commonalities and differences in these developments. While the COVID-19 pandemic started at the start of 2020 in all the regarded countries, the

Table 2.1 Different categories of blocked and non-blocked forms of social work practice education

Typology	Characteristics	Countries
Blocks of practice education period	Social work practice education is divided into two blocks of time The first phase occurs sometime before the last year of the BA and refers to preparatory practice activities. The second phase occurs in the last year of the BA and refers to activities that students fulfill in the host organizations	*Italy, Ukraine, Germany, England, Romania*[a]
No blocks of practice education period	Social work practice education is embedded in the whole program	*Belgium, Turkey, Czech Republic, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Slovakia*

Source: The authors

[a]In *Romania*, there is a unique structure that splits up social work practice education: students begin anywhere from their first year of study (first or second semester) to their last year (usually for 1 day/week of school, over 28 weeks in the academic year) and engage in a daily practice at the end of each academic year (usually for 2 weeks, for a total of 50–60 h)

[1]There were no explicit statements from *Belgium, England, Norway, Turkey*, or *Ukraine* in the reports, though we assume that in these countries, there would be a supervisory role within social work practice education.

comparison showed different paces of spreading. Whereas in *Italy, England, Germany, Belgium*, and *Spain*, the pandemic mainly spread in late January and the beginning of February, in *Turkey, the Czech Republic, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Ukraine*, and *Romania*, it only began to take hold in March. Protective measures were taken in all the countries (wearing masks, keeping social distance, etc.), and the extent of lockdown periods was more or less the same, albeit with some variety in the initial governmental assessment and understanding. In *Norway*, the local authorities initially neglected the pandemic and assumed it would have minimal impact. Early on, *Spain*'s government established rather relaxed measures, stating it was time for a "new normal" after 2 months of lockdown in March. In Romania, the second wave of the pandemic in October 2020 went largely unrecognized by local authorities, leading them not to reintroduce the restrictive measures from the first wave.

Altogether, the identified impacts of the COVID-19 measures on social work practice education from the country reports can be described along a spectrum of centralized and de-centralized measures, which could also emerge simultaneously in both forms within each country. The spectrum and examples of its varieties are shown in Fig. 2.2.

In addition, it is worth noting that the existence and influence of structural disadvantages among different populations of students increased (e.g., in England, Germany, Czech Republic). This situation most likely applies to all the regarded countries.

2.3.3 Inspiring Examples for Innovation in Social Work Practice Education: Impacts Emerging from the COVID-19 Pandemic

A third step in the country reports was to collect and compare the different examples of innovation and changes within social work practice education in the different countries. The statements in the background country reports show that many impacts emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic seem to have significantly supported the implementation of innovations that would not have been discussed in the pre-COVID-19 era. In the reports and discussions, the participating scholars from *Germany, the Czech Republic*, *and Italy* directly mentioned the effect of the pandemic as an accelerator of diverse innovation and experimentation; the participants from *Norway* even regarded the pandemic as a factor for a new digital revolution in teaching. Many practice organizations and universities used the challenges of the pandemic to develop and establish completely new forms of internships. Examples of these included online and hybrid settings, the use of students for research and concept development instead of face-to-face work with clients, digital forms like podcasts, Discord platforms, Instagram profiles, and mobile, outdoor, or walking activities replacing indoor activities. In *Portugal*, the innovation challenge was

Limit type A: Centralized measures	Limit type B: De-centralized measures
I. Broad measures with low regional autonomy; state measures predominate, and diversity is deliberately reduced (Czech Republic)	I. High diversity among regions (Italy); individual responses depending on local conditions (Belgium)
II. Social work authorities make recommendations for educational modification; professional associations obtain information from students and identify impacts at the individual learner level (England)	II. Individual responsibility of educators depending on local conditions (Belgium); uncoordinated bottom-up activities with low impact but addressing specific problems of specific actors (Italy)
III. A relatively rapid transition to online teaching, followed by => initial problems with technology, followed by a => relatively rapid onset of innovation in teaching (Germany, Norway)	III. Complicated and ongoing transition toward online teaching (Turkey, Ukraine)
IV. Relatively quick engagement with online tools for learner development and support for outdoor activities outside organizations in public places (open-air) (Germany); the "home office practice" where learners perform tasks assigned by the practice organizations at home (data processing, study materials, etc.) (Czech Republic)	IV. First, most placements did not seek online or outdoor solutions, and practice education paused; => social work associations started to simulate practice organizations and offered alternatives (case discussions and experience sharing); finally, there was => innovation at the level of engagement of new actors (Turkey). Schools started to simulate practice organizations more and developed specific courses and projects that engaged practitioners in different ways (Italy, Spain).
V. Existing research on the impact of pandemic measures on social work education, leading to => more comprehensive data and information on problems, reactions, and innovations (Italy)	V. Only sporadic exploration of the topic (at the level of engaged students and their theses) (Czech Republic)

In addition, it is worth noting that the existence and influence of structural disadvantages among different populations of students increased (e.g., in England, Germany, Czech Republic). This situation most likely applies to all the regarded countries.

Fig. 2.2 Impacts of public measures on social work practice education during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: The authors)

related to the methods of contact with clients or students, i.e. how to innovate to allow interactions without being face-to-face. According to the participating scholar from *Spain*, the pandemic represented a massive thematic area for research and innovation, but there was also a risk of certain innovations being neglected.

The most common innovation was the shift from social work practice education with direct contact to online forms of contact. In all countries, new forms of online social work training were developed and managed at the regional and local levels. (One exception was the *Czech Republic*, which granted less regional autonomy.) The pace of the shift from in-person to online training varied across the counties. There was, for example, a relatively quick shift to online forms of social work practice education in *Italy, England, Germany, Norway, Spain, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Slovakia, Portugal*, and *Romania*. In contrast, the country reports for *Turkey* and *Ukraine* mentioned a rather slow and complicated shift to online forms of social work practice education. In all countries, the shift to online forms of social work practice education was carried out with considerable energy and creativity. At the same time, *Italy* and *Belgium* also reported a wide variety of regional differences. In *England*, social work education providers could make their own decisions about adjustments for social work practice education together with social work practice providers.

The online activities ranged from webinars held by social work experts (*Italy, Czech Republic, Spain, Slovakia, Romania*) to online research, case discussion, and video conferences (*Belgium, Portugal, Turkey, and Ukraine*) to research activities for the hosting organizations (*Czech Republic*). Colleagues from *Italy, Belgium, England*, and *Romania* adopted hybrid strategies, offering social work practice education activities both online and in person. In *Portugal*, trained social work students acted as virtual agents to conduct practice situations.

The participants from *Italy* and *Spain* mentioned concrete examples where practice organizations developed simulations to enable a deeper understanding of social work practice together with the students. Here, supervisors and academic staff met the students online and supported them in their critical reflections on the simulations and their lessons for practice. In *Italy,* other innovative methods, such as narrative laboratories via Zoom, called "Experimental Laboratories," specifically trained students for active listening and professional writing in social work, were introduced. For some of these activities, different universities collaborated, for instance, with common projects between the social work programs at the Tuscan universities of Florence, Siena, and Pisa.

Participants also commented on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning. The participants from *Germany, Italy*, and *Norway* regarded using digital devices as beneficial for learning about topics and acquiring new digital skills. However, there were also critical voices. Some remarked that online activities in social work practice education can still only serve as a surrogate, as they tend to deprive students of the experience of the most crucial aspects of social work practice, such as managing emotions and handling personal encounters. Some also noted that the digital divide was often very visible, especially among students with

limited technical devices or slow or lacking internet connection (especially reported for *Italy, Romania*, and *Ukraine*).

2.3.4 Current and Future Social Challenges and Tensions Emerging from the Pandemic

Some background country reports showed that new tensions and topics emerged from the pandemic, especially in the form of growing social separation and increased inequality, poverty, social segregation, and tensions between those who followed the public measures and those who did not recognize their relevance. The reports also mentioned a general increase of voices from anti-democratic, authoritarian, and anti-scientific movements, which in turn led to an increased availability of conspiracy narratives, the existence of media bubbles, and a reduction in the quality of public discourse. These are certain issues that also impact social cohesion and the tasks and conditions for social work.

On the other hand, some of the background country reports mentioned improved public discourse and support for progressive themes emerging from the pandemic. Examples of this were the need for societies with more socio-ecological resilience, the stronger recognition of climate and sustainability issues and their connection to social issues, the need for environmental justice, the emergence of approaches for post-growth economics and ecosocial sufficiency, more local forms of production and supply chains, the need for anti-oppressive measures for LGBTQIA+ communities, the promotion of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students, and even the need for the further academization and professionalization of social work. This small list may reflect the emancipatory potential that could emerge from the pandemic.

2.3.5 Suggestions for Further Research

From our analysis of the individual country reports, we recommend the following research activities that may help develop a broader and deeper understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the innovations of social work practice education. Some of these topics have already been integrated into our survey (Chap. 3), but they could also serve as inspiration for other reflections and studies on the further development of social work practice education. From the context of our analyses, we recommend a consideration of the following points:

1. The country reports convey significant information about different political, historical, and social conditions for the welfare state, social work, and social work practice education. At the same time, the reports could only capture initial reflections from these settings. To gain a deeper and more systematic understanding,

there would need to be more intensive longitudinal research about the different nations' diverse conditions to look for correlations and comparisons between conditions, outcomes, and the design of social work practice education phases in the different countries.
2. The qualitative background country analysis highlights certain attributes of social work practice education. For a more detailed understanding, it would be helpful to obtain quantitative information regarding social work practice education placements in different countries. It could be of interest to know more about the available and needed placements, as well as how organizations assure the quality of the learning opportunities for the professional development of social work students.
3. It would be interesting to know more about the design and governance of social work practice education settings in different countries. Relevant questions could be the extent to which schools are free to organize new and innovative social work practice education settings, how arrangements of supervision and mentoring are related to academic and personal reflection, and how different stakeholders can be brought together for optimal outcomes and results. Beyond this, it would be useful to identify which structural measures enable innovation and which ones are barriers.
4. It would be very helpful to have more detailed quantitative and qualitative knowledge on the types and extent of social work practice education innovations, especially with regard to structural innovations (time, length, supervision, service user, student involvement), methodological innovations (simulations, social work/counseling ambulances for clients at universities), new forms (mobile offers, walking settings, public settings, assemblies with ample distance between individuals, protection measures, home office), the balance of digital, analog, and hybrid forms, and social innovations (deceleration, post-growth, swapping, sharing, local solidarity, local supply chains, circular economy, local food supply, neighborhood networks).
5. While the memories of the COVID-19 pandemic have already started to fade, it would be worthwhile to document how similar social challenges and tensions should be met and how we, as a profession and society, could learn from our experiences to prepare for future challenges. It seems crucial to discuss what we can and should glean from all that has been learned in the different countries to prepare future social work professionals for their role in society.

2.4 Outlook

In this chapter, we created an analytical basis for a more comprehensive understanding of social work practice education in Europe. The findings indicate enormous variability among the studied countries regarding the formation of practice education and its dependency on social work institutionalization in the respective countries. International comparison, mutual learning, and exchange of ideas are essential

for creating bridges among different traditions, countries, and approaches. These bridges are necessary for building international social work practice, education, and research.

The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered commonalities, differences, and limitations in practice education in the studied countries. On the one hand, our findings indicate that the pandemic led to an active, inventive, and sensitive approach to innovation in social work practice education that could positively affect the educator-student-practitioner relationship. Often, despite governmental restrictions and the challenges of the pandemic, the actors involved did not feel left behind; to the contrary, they created new practices to compensate for the loss of face-to-face contact in practice education. On the other hand, practice education—that critical point for future social workers where theory and practice come together—could not always meet the aims and standards of the social work profession, causing some cohorts of new social work practitioners to enter the field without direct contact with target groups and therefore little hands-on experience. This aspect should be regarded as even more problematic in countries with highly formalized and powerful social work institutionalization. For other countries, the pandemic was an opportunity to develop new ways of engaging students within sub-optimally designed social work practice fields and finding innovative and empowering solutions.

The findings helped inspire and ground the survey design and raised essential topics for discussion in the workshops and webinars of SWooPEd. At the same time, the study revealed that for a whole cohort of students—now active social work practitioners—the shared generational experience of the pandemic may have strengthened their resilience and professional competencies, whereas others remain more affected after such an unexpected crisis.

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Chapter 3
Social Work Practice Education During and Beyond the Pandemic: A European Survey

Florin Lazăr, Riccardo Guidi, Anca Mihai, and Kübranur Görmüş

3.1 Introduction

The global outbreak of COVID-19 affected many areas such as health, education, economy, politics, and social life, leading to changes in people's lifestyles and life conditions (Drolet et al., 2020). From human relationships to consumption habits, from healthcare services to working conditions, new regulations have been implemented (van Dorn et al., 2020). One of the immediate adjustments made after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, was in the field of education (Dempsey et al., 2021). The negative impacts of this situation have been particularly felt in higher education institutions (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Malka, 2021). With the discontinuation of face-to-face education, universities and field organizations conducting practical applications had physically closed (Tedam, 2020). However, to ensure that education continues, digital tools have been supported, and education has been compulsorily transferred to an online platform. This posed a challenge in social work education, which focuses on human relationships, as it involves presenting the desired professional knowledge, values, and skills to students in a virtual setting (Csoba & Diebel, 2020). The

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impact of this challenge was particularly observed in practice education, which is referred to as the *"signature pedagogy of social work education"* (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2015); government policies, health concerns, and security conditions have prevented each student from engaging in face-to-face field education (Crocetto, 2021). The CSWE (2020a) emphasized in their published guidelines on field education for social work students the need to reduce field education hours and highlighted that face-to-face field practices, which were expected to take place, could be conducted through remote activities to ensure student safety. This allowed for flexibility in meeting the required field education hours that students need to complete face-to-face, thus providing them with various alternatives in case they are unable to fulfill those hours (CSWE, 2020b; Davis & Mirick, 2021). As a result, specific statements regarding field education have not been made, and the decisions have been left to the universities and programs' management.

Social work, with its focus on face-to-face human relationships, communication styles, and assessing individuals within their social environment, limited the use of digital tools, as it embraces principles and theories that prioritize these in-person interactions (Perron et al., 2010). While the global pandemic presented social work academics, educators, students, and field supervisors with new and diverse challenges (Malka, 2021), it also compelled universities to reconsider the modality of social work education and develop alternative models to address the evolving needs (Morris et al., 2020). Especially in Europe, with the rapid transition of education to online platforms due to the pandemic (Gad, 2022), social work academics, educators, and field education advisors have expressed that education can also be conducted on online platforms (Csoba & Diebel, 2020). While social work academics initially had concerns about online education during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the widespread adoption and development of online practices have led to the observation of its benefits. It was emphasized that the process provided students with different experiences and highlighted creativity professionally (McLaughlin et al., 2020). Organizations responsible for accrediting social work education supported a number of possible alternative activities to mitigate disruption and the lack of ability to fulfill the required number of practice hours. These included simulated practice, online meetings, training courses, field-based assignments and projects (Crocetto, 2021).

On the other hand, despite the COVID-19 pandemic being a universal problem, the experiences of countries, communities, individuals, and specifically students in dealing with its effects varied. Factors such as countries' policies, culture, economy, and risk conditions (Grek & Landri, 2021), as well as technological infrastructure deficiencies or limitations and issues with internet connectivity (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020) became important considerations. Therefore, it was noted that not every student has access to similar opportunities, resulting in a noticeable opportunity inequality among students (Wallengren Lynch et al., 2023). Additionally, it is argued that providing online supervision to social work students during field education can be challenging, as non-human interaction models may not be sufficient in developing students' skills, and supervisors need to observe students (Tuncay, 2020). Therefore, it is emphasized that face-to-face interaction and real-time engagement

are crucial in terms of practice courses (Abukan et al., 2023). Another important aspect to consider in social work field education and the utilization of technology through online platforms is how ethical values and confidentiality for students, clients, supervisors, and field advisors will be preserved and how informed consent is ethically obtained (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017; Reamer, 2013). Considering the advantages and disadvantages of digitalization, it is argued that in social work education, the aim should be to utilize such tools as intermediary agents rather than relying solely on technology-based tools to provide a flexible learning environment (Tuncay, 2020). It is acknowledged that such a perspective is an important element for social work education, which values social context, human relationships, and face-to-face interaction.

With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, social work education in European countries quickly transitioned to online platforms and adapted to e-learning through technological tools. During this transition process, technological tools played a supportive role (Gad, 2022). Prior to the global pandemic, the content of social work practice education in Europe generally exhibited similarities, but after the pandemic, the approaches adopted by countries and universities varied.

3.2 Social Work Practice Education During the Pandemic: Suggestions from Literature

The pandemic shook social work education like a tsunami (Wallengren-Lynch et al., 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2020). The difficulties experienced by the actors of social work education, including schools and social work organizations, educators, students (and their families), and users, were multiple and serious, with one of the most radical challenges being "practice education"(IASSW-IFSW, 2020: 13). While conventional classes of social work programs in Western countries could be switched from an in-person to an online modality in a relatively simple way, providing social work students with practice skills which usually require face-to-face relations and field activities after those were prohibited or seriously limited was a real dilemma.

Initial contributions suggested three possible types of reaction to the radical difficulties of practice education during the pandemic. A *first* and basic reaction consisted of *waiting and restarting* practice education programs and activities when possible. In the contexts where the pandemic and restrictive measures were neither hard nor long, this reaction was probably the best because it kept practice education activities unchanged. In the other contexts, it was instead largely unsatisfying. A *second* possible reaction was partially or totally skipping the practice education activities planned in social work programs (O'Rourke et al., 2020). This meant reducing the hours of practice or, more drastically, canceling practice education activities and allowing the students to graduate. This reaction prioritized students' need to live safely and graduate without delay. It also probably made the life of the staff members of the schools of social work simpler in a very harsh conjuncture, but

it risked providing students with insufficient skills. A third type of reaction consisted of innovating practice education by experimenting with new modalities, which kept the typical and characterizing factors of practice education as much as possible during the unprecedented pandemic (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020; Morley & Clarke, 2020). The *third* type of reaction exalted the "resilience of social work education and highlight(ed) its strengths in meeting societal and global challenges" (Wallengren-Lynch et al., 2021, 13). Nevertheless, the more strict and long the restrictive pandemic measures were, the more difficult it was to provide students with innovative and effective practice education activities. Innovating practice education sometimes corresponded to *inventing something new and unprecedented* under overwhelming pressure and a high level of uncertainty about the possible educational outcomes. Previous literature in social work education did not significantly support such innovation. For example, the use of ICT in practice education activities—an aspect that became crucial in 2020—was not even mentioned in the most cited reviews in the first 2000s (Bogo, 2006, 2015). The studies focused on online social work programs that did not shape alternative modalities of practice education (Vicary et al., 2018) but identified the limits to applying it to practice education (Mohan Dash, 2018).

Our study about the pandemic-related adaptations and innovations of practice education may benefit from the consideration of literature about practice education and change. Literature encourages us to conceive practice education programs as complex, multi-level and dynamic systems. Here, the dyadic relationship between the student and field instructor is crucial and context-dependent (Bogo, 2006). Also, due to the pressure of neomanagerialism and austerity measures, social service organizations where field instructors work may not support the aspiration of practitioners to supervise the interns (Globerman & Bogo, 2003). Practice education programs are thus the results of the interactions between schools, social service organizations, field instructors and students in a context that has not been particularly favorable in the last 15 years (Ayala et al., 2018; Baginsky et al., 2019).

Although the pandemic seriously limited all the crucial actors of practice education programs, the schools might have acted as strategic actors and institutional entrepreneurs (Fligstein, 1997, 2013, Hwang & Powell, 2005). Differently from ordinary times, they probably had to reconsider what to prioritize and find a new balance between competing actors, identities and needs. For example, they probably had to find a balance between the students' need to live in safety, be well trained and graduate as soon as possible and/or between the students' and the educators' demands. Some initial contributions to practice education during the pandemic underlined that students' wellbeing and learning outcomes were at the core of the priorities of some innovations in Pennsylvania (Crocetto, 2021) and Australia (Morley & Clarke, 2020).

Coherently with the well-known path dependency hypothesis (Mahoney, 2000), in finding a way to react to the pandemic, the schools probably depended on conjunctural factors (e.g., COVID-related restrictions) and previous dynamics, beliefs, and structures. For example, in their own choices the schools' leaders could have

been seriously influenced by previous choices about the structure and staff of practice education, the administrative praxis of the schools, and the national and international guidelines on practice education. These influences could have been positive or negative. On the one hand, old weaknesses of practice education or social and institutional deficits increased the difficulties of practice education programs in 2020–2021 (Buchanan & Bailey-Belafonte, 2021). On the other hand, previous digital experimentations gave schools an opportunity to react to difficulties more quickly and effectively (La Rose & Detlor, 2021; Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020).

In the study about the pandemic-related adaptations and innovations of practice education, we also tried to overcome two limitations. While the literature on practice education has mostly focused on single programs and countries, we have focused on the changes, continuities and challenges of practice education programs of the European schools of social work during the pandemic. Moreover, as pointed out in a recent review by Sewell et al. (2023), studies on practice education during the pandemic have mostly used qualitative methods and have mainly adopted the students' perspective, while in this contribution, we will use quantitative methods and adopt the teaching staff's perspective.

3.2.1 Methods

An online survey (on SurveyMonkey) was carried out between March and August 2022. Initially, the survey was distributed in English to the countries involved in the EASSW-funded SWooPEd project (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, UK and Ukraine). Later, it was disseminated through the EASSW website, the EASSW newsletter, and social media platforms. To increase the reach of the questionnaire in Spain, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish and further disseminated.

3.2.1.1 Procedure

A national database with contact details from each school was created by each member of the project. An introductory letter explaining the type of information required was prepared and sent over by each partner representative. Sometimes, the emails were accompanied by follow-up phone calls to monitor the receiving of the emails and encourage responses. Each partner invited all the heads of the schools/departments/faculties of social work in her/his own country to fill in the online questionnaire. The Heads could delegate a colleague (e.g., a person responsible for the social work practice education program). Only one filled questionnaire was accepted for each school, the analysis unit being thus the school.

3.2.1.2 Measures and Data Analysis

The questionnaire comprised 32 questions grouped into five sections: socio-demographics, general information about regular social work practice education at BA Level in 2020–2021, social work practice education in the pandemic, the perceived impact of changes in practice education during the pandemic and lessons learned. In this chapter, we present the socio-demographics and two questions related to the activities carried out and the perceived impact of changes in practice education: an exploratory factor analysis (Field, 2009) accompanied by descriptive statistics and a Pearson correlations test. The whole data analysis was carried out using SPSS 29 and Microsoft 365 (Excel).

3.2.2 Results

After data cleaning, 150 social work schools from 15 European countries responded to the online survey (12 from the partner countries and from Albania, Croatia and Malta; for a full overview, see Table 3.1).

More than 80% of the respondents are between 25 and 59 years old, 60% are women and 62% work for less than 10 years in the current academic position (for a full overview, see Table 3.2).

Of the total respondents (n = 150), approximately 70% were qualified social workers, 14% were sociologists, and 6% were qualified in social pedagogy. The survey was also filled in by specialists with qualifications in psychology, education, law, medicine, theology, social policy, social anthropology, and history. The survey was answered mostly by practice educators, social work academics or lecturers

Table 3.1 Distribution of respondents and response rates by country

Partners	Total no. of social work departments 2022	Total no. of social work departments that completed the survey	Overall response rate
Belgium	33	7	21%
Czech Republic	25	10	40%
Germany	95	20	21%
Italy	37	25	68%
Norway	11	3	27%
Portugal	14	2	14%
Romania	38	20	53%
Slovakia	10	8	80%
Spain	37	16	43%
Turkey	55	31	56%
UK	Missing data	2	Missing data
Ukraine	88	8	9%

Table 3.2 Distribution of respondents by age, gender, and years on current academic position

Age	**%**
25–35	11.4
35–50	49.7
50–59	31.5
60–70+	7.4
Gender	%
Male	39.3
Female	60.7
Years in position	
Less than 2	6.7
2–4	32.0
5–9	23.3
10–14	19.3
15–24	15.3
25+	3.3

(56% of responses, $n = 150$). Heads of Schools of Social Work also largely contributed (40% of responses).

3.2.2.1 Practice Education Activities Carried Out

The respondents were asked which of the 17 listed activities were used between 2019 and 2022. For each activity, the averages of responses per year were calculated. The closer the average to 0, the less was implemented. The closer to 1, the more was implemented (for a full overview, see Fig. 3.1).

The application of an exploratory factor analysis identified five factors (KMO 0.819 and p-value <0.001). The rotated factor matrix is presented in Table 3.3. According to the analysis, the activities implemented during the pandemic to substitute regular practice education activities can be separated into five components:

1. Substitution through assignments, reports, discussions with experts and service users, visits of practice placements, and case studies, which could be considered *simulations of regular practice education*.
2. Walk and talk, social café, offering online services and recording themselves practicing different skills represent the second component, which involves discussions and reflections, highlighting *unconventional methods*.
3. Watching recordings created by lecturers and movies is the third component, represented by *video content*.
4. The fourth component includes *group work*, either synchronous or asynchronous.
5. The fifth component includes a *continuation of conventional practice education* in organizations, either in person or online.

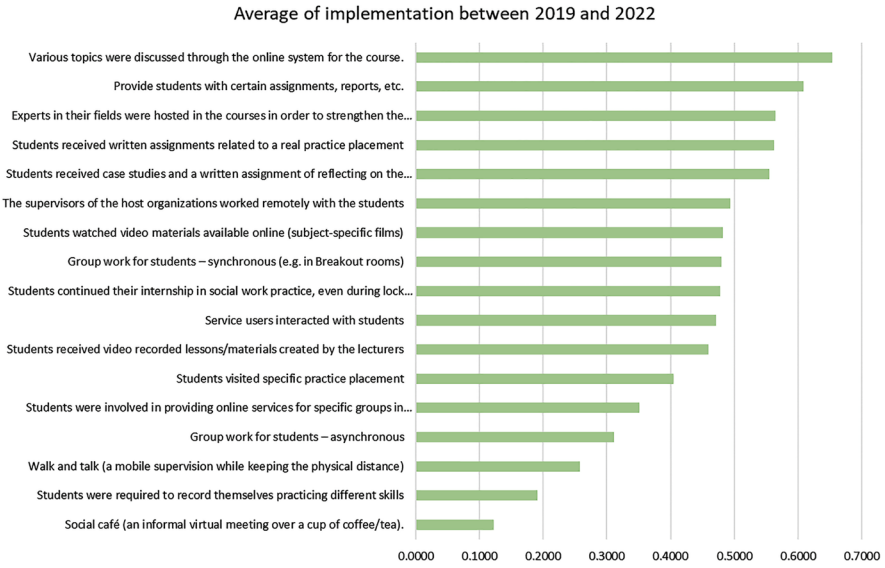

Fig. 3.1 Average score for each activity carried out during 3 academic years (2019/2020, 2020/2021, 2021/2022)

The most common approach taken by schools of social work was to simulate regular practice education, followed by continuation of practice education remote or onsite, use of video content and group work, while some used unconventional practice education methods.

3.2.2.2 Perceived Impacts on Practice Education

Respondents were invited to assess the impact of the pandemic on practice education. Each question was measured on a scale from 1. "Extremely negative" to 5. "Extremely positive." An exploratory factor analysis was carried out for all 17 items (dimension reduction, with the principal component method) and four factors resulted (KMO 0,868, with p-value <0.001) (Field, 2009, p. 647).

Based on the initial findings, a new factor analysis was conducted (principal component method with Anderson-Rubin method for obtaining uncorrelated and standardized factor scores (Field, 2009, p. 635). Given that the interaction between students and field educators from faculty/school was introduced twice (first to evaluate it in general and second to evaluate the impact of online practice on the interactions between the parties) and the initial results, the second one was excluded from the factor analysis.

Altogether, four factors were identified in the explanatory factor analysis, with, however, a slightly different order than expected:

Table 3.3 Results from an exploratory factor analysis of practice education activities carried out—grouped into five factors

Activities	Dimension	Simulation of regular practice education—1	Unconventional methods—2	Video content—3	Group work—4	Continuation of conventional practice education—5
Various topics were discussed through the online system for the course.	1	0.407		0.323	0.321	
Students received case studies and a written assignment to reflect on the case	1	0.750		0.111	0.215	
Provide students with certain assignments, reports, etc.	1	0.674		0.112	0.189	
Experts in their fields were hosted in the courses to strengthen the students' field experiences.	1	0.716		0.147	0.176	
Students visited specific practice placement	1	0.551	0.210			0.255
Service users interacted with students	1	0.613	0.194	0.103		0.211
Students received written assignments related to a real practice placement	1	0.705		0.189	0.126	0.124

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Activities	Dimension	Simulation of regular practice education—1	Unconventional methods—2	Video content—3	Group work—4	Continuation of conventional practice education—5
Students were required to record themselves practicing different skills	2	0.380	0.430			
Students were involved in providing online services for specific groups in cooperation with partners	2	0.131	0.475	0.223		0.398
Walk and talk (a mobile supervision while keeping a physical distance)	2	0.116	0.615	0.131	0.160	0.187
Social café (an informal virtual meeting over a cup of coffee/tea).	2		0.581	0.146		0.111
Students watched video materials available online (subject-specific films)	3	0.371	0.240	0.586	0.144	

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

Activities	Dimension	Simulation of regular practice education—1	Unconventional methods—2	Video content—3	Group work—4	Continuation of conventional practice education—5
Students received video-recorded lessons/ materials created by the lecturers	3	0.169	0.230	0.884		0.128
Group work for students—synchronous (e.g., in breakout rooms)	4	0.169			0.802	
Group work for students—asynchronous	4	0.207	0.278		0.424	0.187
Students continued their internship in social work practice, even during the lockdown	5				0.157	0.572
The supervisors of the host organizations worked remotely with the students	5	0.325	0.234	0.101		0.400

Factor 1—Perceived impact on practice education, determined by the high scores on variables: Perceived impact on students' participation in the practice education activities; Perceived impact on students' academic performance; Perceived impact on quality of practice education; Perceived impact on the use of online platforms of students, field supervisors and academic staff; Perceived impact on learning content.

Factor 2—Perceived impact on schools' resilience, determined by the variables: Perceived impact on lecturers' adaptation; Perceived impact on school

measurements/policy; Perceived impact on interaction between students and field educators from faculty/school; Perceived impact on teaching methods.

Factor 3—The impact of online practice on wellbeing, determined by the variables: The impact of online practice on lecturers' wellbeing; The impact of online practice on students' wellbeing.

Factor 4—The impact of online practice on students' success, determined by the variables: The impact of online practice on students' skills; The impact of online practice on students' readiness for practice; The impact of online practice on field practice educators.

At the same time, some of the variables had a loading on the rotated component matrix lower than 0.5, and because the sample is formed by 100 cases with responses for all the used variables (out of the total number of respondents $n = 150$ schools), the scores are not shown in Table 3.4. The decision is supported by the recommendation of Field (2009, p. 644). The analysis has a KMO of 0.863, showing compact patterns of correlation (Field 2009, p. 647) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity with p-value <0.001.

Further correlation analyses were performed to investigate possible associated variables. No correlation was found between the four factors in the last analysis and qualification of respondents, role (management or non-management), years of experience or number of credits. There is a moderate negative correlation (Pearson Correlation −0.267, p-value 0.007) between the number of new students and the perceived impact of online education on wellbeing—a lower number of students is associated with an above sample's average positive perception of the impact of online education on wellbeing. A moderate positive correlation exists in the sample between the number of staff employed in practice education and the perceived impact on practice education (Pearson Correlation 0.220, p-value 0.028). The schools with higher numbers of staff perceive the impact on practice education more positively. A low negative correlation exists between the number of staff employed in practice education and the perceived impact of online education on wellbeing (Pearson Correlation −0.203, p-value 0.043). The schools with more staff perceive online education's impact on wellbeing to be more negative. There is a positive correlation between the number of students and the number of lecturers employed in practice education (Pearson Correlation 0.469, p-value <0.001). No correlation was found between the factors and the modality in which practice education continued (online, in-person, or hybrid).

Given the low number of correlations, the means of the variables describing each factor were used to further explore the data. On average, the impact on schools' resilience was perceived as rather positive (3.53 of 5, with 0.76 standard deviation). Also, rather positively evaluated was the impact on overall practice (3.3 out of 5, with 0.77 standard deviation). On average, the perceived impact on students' success and wellbeing was rated lower but rather positive, with 2.71 of 5 (and 0.79 standard deviation) for the former and 2.49 of 5 (with 0.85 standard deviation) for the latter. In conclusion, on average, the impact on overall practice and schools'

Table 3.4 Results from the exploratory factor analysis of the perceived impact of online practice education—grouped into four factors

Perceived impact on	Perceived impact on practice education	Perceived impact on schools' resilience	The impact of online practice on wellbeing	The impact of online practice on students' success
Students' participation in the practice education activities	0.82			
Students' academic performance	0.681			
Quality of practice education	0.639			
Use of online platforms for students, field supervisors and academic staff	0.62			
Learning content	0.611			
Lecturers' adaptation		0.82		
School measurements/ policy		0.777		
Interaction between students and field educators from faculty/ school		0.661		
Teaching methods		0.54		
The impact of online practice on lecturers' wellbeing			0.853	
The impact of online practice on students' wellbeing			0.853	
Evaluation methods				
The impact of online practice on students' skills				0.808
The impact of online practice on students' readiness for practice				0.774
The impact of online practice on field practice educators				0.693
Access to virtual infrastructure for students				

resilience was perceived more positively than the perceived impact the pandemic-determined changes had on students' success and general wellbeing. It is nevertheless observed that, on average, the perceived impact is regarded as rather positive by the survey respondents.

Starting from the first-factor analysis, the variables from each factor were used to calculate a mean value. Four new variables resulted with values from 1 to 5. Each variable was recoded: the values below 2.5 were included in a rather negative perception of impact, and those above 2.5 were included in a rather positive perception of impact. Table 3.5 presents results from using the variables with these two categories.

A low association was found between the role of the respondents and the perceived impact on schools' resilience (Phi Cramer's V 0.175, p-value 0.050). Those with management roles had a more negative image of perceived impact on school resilience than field educators.

Although there is a low association, the schools with 180 total credits for bachelor studies have a more positive perception of impact on overall practice education (Phi Cramer's V 0.178, p-value 0.046). A moderate association is between the perceived impact of the pandemic on schools' resilience and whether practice education is coordinated at the departments' level with instructions and guidelines for field supervisors/tutors and students (Phi Cramer's V 0.190, p-value 0.033). Overall, the association shows that the departments with no specific guidelines perceive the

Table 3.5 Correlations of perceived impact of online practice education (rather positive vs. rather negative) with significant variables

		Rather negative (%)	Rather positive (%)	Total (%)
Perceived impact on school resilience	With a role in management	9 (16)	46 (84)	55 (100)
	Lecturers/field educators	4 (6)	67 (94)	71 (100)
	No specific instructions	3 (30)	7 (70)	10 (100)
	The application directive prepared by the department	10 (9)	106 (91)	116 (100)
	Did not allow to skip or postpone practice education	5 (6)	80 (94)	85 (100)
	Allowed to skip or postpone practice education	8 (19)	33 (81)	41 (100)
	Continued practice education hybrid or in-person	7 (7)	91 (93)	98 (100)
	Continued practice education online	6 (21)	22 (79)	28 (100)
Perceived impact of online practice education on students' success	Were not allowed to reduce practice education hours	23 (35)	42 (65)	65 (100)
	Were allowed to reduce practice education hours	33 (54)	28 (46)	61 (100)

impact of the pandemic on schools' resilience more negatively than those with guidelines prepared at the department level. It needs to be mentioned that most departments provide guidelines to instructors and students (n = 139) compared to those who have no clear instructions (n = 11).

There is a low association between the schools that allowed practice education to be skipped or postponed and the perceived impact on schools' resilience (Phi Cramer's V 0.210, p-value 0.018). More of the departments that allowed students to skip or postpone practice education considered that the pandemic had a negative impact on schools' resilience than those who did not allow students to skip or postpone practice. Overall, the majority considered the impact rather positively. The association is statistically significant at the cell level.

The departments where students were not allowed to reduce practice education hours perceived the impact of the pandemic on students' success more positively than those who allowed students to skip practice education. The association is rather low (Phi Cramer's V 0.188, p-value 0.035), with statistically significant association at the cell level. Those departments that stopped and continued practice education online perceive the impact on schools' resilience more negatively than those who continued hybrid or in-person practice (Phi Cramer's V 0.195, p-value 0.028).

While most schools of social work managed to adapt relatively well to the pandemic in terms of infrastructure and curricula, the impact on students' practice skills and performances was perceived to be more negative than on the school-related factors.

3.3 Discussion and Conclusions

The current study highlighted how schools of social work throughout Europe adapted practice education to the restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic with valuable findings for the coming years. Our results evidence that most schools of social work used simulated practice education activities. Similarly, in their study, Kourgiantakis and Lee (2020) facilitated students' exposure to cases through simulations during the pandemic and encouraged other students to observe the process. It was observed that this activity contributed to the transfer of emotions, thoughts, and experiences.

Other schools adopted innovative teaching methods, as pointed out also by Drolet et al. (2020) and Crocetto (2021), among others. Some used video materials (e.g., video recordings of simulated role-plays, etc.), social cafés (informal virtual meetings), or 'walk and talk' settings (mobile supervision while keeping the required physical distance) alongside virtual meetings with tutors, service users or supervisors, assignments, or group work to teach students to practice skills. For instance, in the study by Mitchell et al. (2021), social work education was restructured week by week. It included field practice guidelines presentations by social work professionals via phone or video conferencing. For the remaining 5 weeks, students were prepared for the process in a medical setting to enhance their

professional skills and critical thinking. Client scenarios were selected to highlight CSWE competencies, and the process was simulated by role-playing with supervisors. Students expressed their satisfaction with such diverse and innovative learning models. Some activities, such as virtual meetings, were kept after the peak of the pandemic in the academic year 2021/2022.

In summary, the following *lessons learned from the pandemic* can be identified from our study. Overall, the perceived impact is regarded as rather positive by the survey respondents. The impact on overall practice and schools' resilience was perceived more positively than the perceived impact of the pandemic on students' success and general wellbeing. This reveals the need to provide mental health support services for both students and staff, as well as post-qualifying education for the "pandemic social work graduates."

Another important finding of the survey is that departments with no specific guidelines for practice education perceive the impact of the pandemic on schools' resilience more negatively than those with guidelines that were prepared at the department level. This underlines the need to support teaching staff and students with specific guidelines for practice education.

The respondents with management roles had a more negative image of the perceived impact on school resilience than the field educators. This can be explained by the fact that the leaders of the schools could have a more general perspective compared with the lecturers involved in the ongoing practice education activities.

In schools with a smaller number of students, it was perceived that the impact was less negative on students' wellbeing than in schools with a higher number of students. A lower number of students possibly allowed closer collaborations or continuing practice education as before.

The schools with a higher number of staff involved in practice education perceived the impact on practice education more positively, but online education's impact on wellbeing is more negative, which is in line with previous studies highlighting the negative impact of high workloads (Sewell et al., 2023).

From the perspective of the teaching staff involved in practice education and that of heads of schools of social work in many European countries, the impact of the changes was important. Overall, the changes adopted during the pandemic were perceived to have negatively influenced the quality of practice education, students' academic performance and students' participation in the practice education activities. The least negative changes were perceived to refer to the access to virtual infrastructure for students, lecturers' adaptation and use of online platforms by students, field supervisors and academic staff.

The most negatively perceived impact was on students' wellbeing, skills and readiness for practice, and lecturers' wellbeing. The least negatively perceived impact was on the interaction between students and field educators from faculty/school and on field practice educators.

Schools of social work need to incorporate into their BA programs the positive changes adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and, at the same time, support students' and lecturers' wellbeing and skills development as the pillars of effective education and future practices. Moreover, providing timely and specific guidelines

for students and teachers on the implementation of practice education creates a 'safe space' for those involved. It increases the chances of better adjustment to future stressors.

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Chapter 4
Temporary Adjustments or Long-Lasting Innovations? The Unconventional Experiences of Social Work Practice Education During the Pandemic and Their Current Value

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4.1 Introduction

Considering the growing number of students accessing the internet through mobile devices before COVID-19, higher education has been increasingly interested in accepting new communication technologies in the teaching context, enhancing the digital transformation of these institutions (Santos et al., 2019). However, digitalization in social work education is related to more than just information technologies in higher education. The change is also a consequence of the digitalization of social work practice itself. The possibilities of using online environments to deliver diverse social work interventions have been discussed for the last decades. As stated by López Peláez et al. (2018), based on the review of 70 articles about using digital technologies in social work, it is irrefutable that new technologies are affecting social work and will be reflected by researchers and practitioners who should address and deal with these recent trends in social work. According to Hill and

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Shaw (2011), social workers today are professionally obligated to improve their digital competence to enhance their service quality and fulfill people's expectations in a digital society. However, digitalization in social work service delivery has been accelerated mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which face-to-face social contact and the need to move many online services were severely curtailed. Although social work education systems vary from country to country, the need for social work schools to provide evidence of how their educational programs are relevant to current practice remains an expectation. Discussion about the need to develop digital competencies of social work students was discussed in several research papers from different countries (see, for example, Adedoyin, 2016; Mishna et al., 2013; López Peláez et al., 2018; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2016; Taylor, 2017; Zhu & Andersen, 2022).

When COVID-19 reached Europe in 2020, which certainly was a tragedy for many, it also provided a unique opportunity for our research group to analyze in more detail how schools of social work in different European countries had reacted and positioned themselves regarding social work practice education. Was there a common European standard, or did the countries work differently and independently? This chapter will examine what experiences were gained during the pandemic from the different approaches faced and developed in social work practice education. What impact did the increased digitalization have on the choice of solutions? The chosen methods and approaches were, of course, dependent on the regulations and the restrictions imposed by the governments during the pandemic. Beyond this, the results show many creative approaches and solutions for the challenges of this situation. However, one central question remains: what does the massive transformation from physical to digital meetings mean for future social work and social work (practice) education? Will there be more distance between the client and the professional, students and teachers or field instructors, or could this gap be bridged?

4.2 Methodology of Analyses

Our analysis of temporary adjustments and long-lasting innovations in social work practice education during COVID-19 is based on the answers provided within the European survey (for detailed information about the methodology of the survey and survey sample, see Chap. 3) implemented as a part of the project "SWooPed—Social Work Practice Education in Times of Pandemics, and Beyond. Continuities, Changes, Innovations in Europe."

A total of 150 social work schools from 15 European countries responded to the online survey. When focusing on temporary adjustments or long-lasting innovations, open-ended questions included in the survey were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative data analyses. The data-driven coding and a thematic analysis of open-ended survey questions focused on creative approaches, challenges generated by COVID-19 in social work practice education and reflections on approaches

towards social work practice education during the pandemic. All three open-ended questions were at the end of the online survey. The response rate of the first open-ended question, "If you are aware of any other creative approaches to carry out practice education during the pandemic within your school, please describe it briefly," was low (<50%) and suffers from nonresponse bias. The second open-ended question: "What was the main challenge generated by COVID-19 in practice education" and the third question: 'Was there a time when you wished you would have done something differently in social work practice education during the pandemic? Could you describe it briefly?" had a much higher response rate (>50%).

The schools of social work which filled out the questionnaire distributed as a part of the project and identified at least one creative approach to practice education during the pandemic, were invited to provide more details about the respective approach. In November 2022, 14 departments came back with their descriptions. The described creative approaches were from Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Spain, Norway, and Belgium. We used the open coding and deductive content analysis process (Gilgun, 2013) for the analyses.

Our study has several limitations. Firstly, it did not include any students' points of view. Secondly, the research findings can only be extended to social work education in some European countries. However, we aimed to summarize the lessons learned from the creative approaches, which can also be used for social work practice education in the future and adapted to particular contexts.

4.3 Adaptations of Practice Education in Social Work During the Pandemic

When analyzing European social work practice education experiences, evolutions or adaptations were detected in and after the pandemic. In this research, evolutions or *adaptations* are defined as *path-dependent changes* developed within the main features of the existing practice education programs of the schools between 2020 and 2022.

Out of a purely quantitative survey, it would be rather challenging to identify adaptations and good practices in the regarded field. We considered integrating three qualitative open questions in the survey to gain more insight into concrete examples. Based on an analysis of this data set and the deeper evaluation and discussion within the research team and in the workshops, we arrived at the following main results, which will be displayed along with the three questions.

The first question aimed to identify possible adaptations within social work practice education settings. Providing an answer to this question was optional. A limitation is that the response rate to this question was low. Still, we could observe that most responses could be summarized along two categories and overlapped with the main challenges identified in the second question:

(a) Social work practice education *was transferred online, and the staff developed activities to replace the suspended onsite direct practice*, such as discussions, debates, videos, guests (experts, service users, retired social workers), online courses, etc.
(b) Social work practice education *was continued in partnership with institutions and NGOs, present or online*.

The main difference between the two is that the pandemic disrupted practice education in the first group, and the implemented activities implied new forms in which students were not assigned to an organization in the field to shadow direct work done by social workers. Instead, they reflected on social work practice through discussions with faculty members and third parties or carried out research tasks. In the second category, the social work practice education continued in an adjusted format, which meant that the students were still directly observing or were actively involved in the practice, in person and/or online, while continuing the pre-pandemic activities, although somehow differently respecting the restrictions imposed during the pandemic.

Another limitation of the first question and the above interpretation is that it is based on the answers to the question that asked the respondents to list the creative practices they know of in their social work school. This means that the respondents may have only presented what they considered creative practice while not describing the activities they considered standard procedures. Therefore, the classification refers only to the provided answers and might be slightly limited concerning the proportionality of answers. In other words, even if three respondents only mentioned that both strategies were implemented, it does not mean that the others did not implement both.

The second question asked respondents about the main challenge generated by the COVID-19 pandemic in social work practice education. Of the 150 respondents, 82 provided a valid answer (approximately 55%). The analysis of the responses led to our conclusion that the most critical challenge was to ensure high-quality education. Adapting to the pandemic measures implied fewer in-person *and more virtual meetings*. This transition, even though only completed in some cases, required all parties to change how practice education was organized. Most answers were related to challenges concerning the adjustment to virtual or blended learning and finding suitable practice places for students.

Analyzing the social work schools' main challenges for practice education during the pandemic, the most identified struggles concerning two dimensions: On the one hand, *the effects of using technology and the internet in practice education* (54%, 44 of 82 responses). On the other hand, it enables continuing in-*person practice education settings or blended learning scenarios* (34%, 28 of 82 responses).

In summary, we could identify the following three categories as being the main challenges for most schools:

(a) Creating online learning opportunities for practice education, referring to *virtual and blended learning.*
(b) *Finding practice placements*.

(c) Dealing with *decreasing time or space for practice education*.

Other answers implied challenges concerning students' mental well-being, joint reflection, the need to make quick and sound decisions, dealing with social distance, being infected by the virus as students, teachers, and partners, motivating students, supporting students finalizing studies, and evaluating students.

4.3.1 Adjusting to Virtual and Blended Learning

When it comes to adjusting to virtual and blended learning, the responses varied from a lack of needed infrastructure and varied levels of skills to adapt to virtual learning to the engagement and motivation of students and the development of the targeted skills and abilities. The quote below is especially characteristic in this sense.

> To guarantee a fruitful experience of practice education to students and to support supervisors in re-inventing their role in an online setting (many supervisors are aged and have difficulties with ICT). Another challenge was managing the tutoring groups in an online modality: it seemed that students did not know each other, and most of them had no relationship. They seemed to bear the practice education alone, in their private rooms...

4.3.2 Finding Practice Placements

The challenge of finding practice placements was mainly focused on transferring the activities entirely online because the public welfare organizations did not accept students as they needed to continue with private organizations or NGOs or to adjust to a diminished schedule, as quoted below.

> The division in the social work field between a prolonged lockdown/working at home/online versus outreach/creative solutions like walking/present social work. We depend upon the quality and creativity of the workplace to offer qualitative learning. Still, some public services have diminished their opening hours or are less reachable, for example.

4.3.3 Decreasing Time or Space for Practice Education

Regarding the challenge of decreasing time or space for practice education, we share the following quote:

> The main challenge was ensuring students had live practice experience and live working relationships. Many students worked almost entirely from home, with little access to a sense of "team"; some conducted most of their interventions online.

Adaptations of social work practice education during the pandemic differed in each school included in the analyses. From the description of creative practices, we can

observe the crucial effort of institutions to secure practice education during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which it was not possible to implement practice education for students in traditional ways. As a summary, we can observe a more intense *focus on the quality of experience*. As one contributor mentioned:

> The quantity of actions performed does not give the practice education results, but by the quality of the experience itself, that creates the ground for the professional quality of the new generations of social workers.

4.3.4 Adaptations Models in Social Work Practice Education

We identified several adaptation models in social work practice education within the described creative approaches (see Fig. 4.1). We can look at these models from different perspectives. One perspective is the relational connection between learning and service, which is often used in service-learning approaches to explain the differences between service-learning and other forms of community engagement in higher education. Service-learning (see also Chap. 6) is distinguished from different community-oriented activities by its connection with the curriculum. It aims to enrich the learning process with a better understanding of the course content and a broader perception of the discipline, supporting students' civic responsibility and strengthening communities (Furco & Norvell, 2019; Rusu et al., 2014) We would characterize the different adaptions of practice education models during the pandemic as situated within a *continuum between the two polarities of service and learning.*

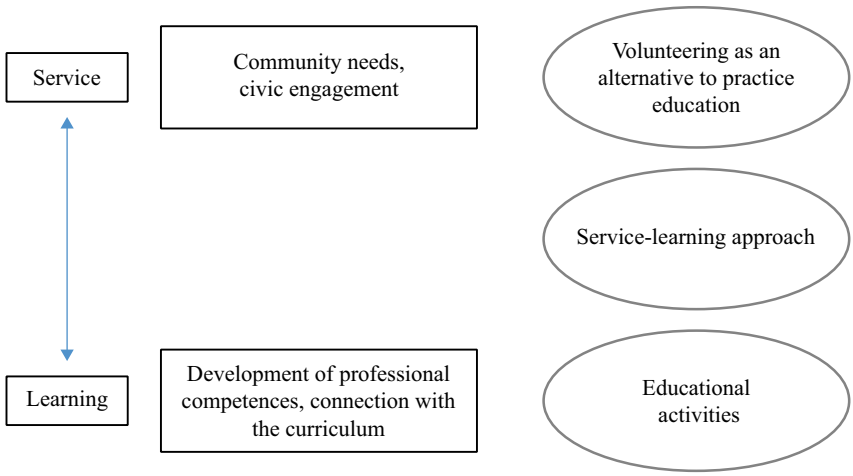

Fig. 4.1 Different types of adaptation in social work practice education during the pandemic. (Source: The authors)

The adaptation model of *volunteering as an alternative to practice education* was based strongly on the student's involvement in volunteer activities in different organizations, mainly connected with the actual needs of organizations and beneficiaries during the pandemic. For example, a university volunteer center was established during the pandemic, and the involvement of students in volunteering was recognized as a practical activity. Volunteer activities were recognized as a form of practice education and were also recognized at some social work schools before the pandemic. However, this was a rather new approach to social work practice education for many other schools.

On the other side of the spectrum, we identified practices consisting of different *creative, practical educational activities for students in online settings,* where students were involved individually or in groups. Alternatives were conducted synchronously and asynchronously. Some of these activities by schools were prepared in cooperation with the organizations (for example, videos from social workers, organizations providing students with access to various materials, and case studies, allowing them to participate in online conferences and meetings). Other alternative educational activities were developed by schools themselves (for example, case studies, students-prepared presentations, walk coaching, etc.). For such purposes, the schools developed rather creative tasks for students and could integrate additional resources such as online opinion measuring tools, quizzes and learning games, group and team environments or interactive whiteboards; social media; video lectures and inputs; and interactive assignments. In the sense of this model, practice education was organized without contact with beneficiaries and simulated using different methods and approaches. In evaluating the two identified experiences in this model, we see crucial points about the effectivity:

> Alternative forms brought the results and were useful during the pandemic, not later. or also Results of the online activities were better, in comparative terms, in the hardest moments of the pandemic (2020–2021), and worse later.

As a model in the middle of the spectrum between the polarities of service and learning, we identified a *service-learning approach*. In this model, students provided different types of concrete services, but mainly in online settings. This approach is related to a reflection of community needs in pandemic times and a search for possibilities for the schools' question "*How can we help?"* while focusing on the learning dimension of practice education. In the service part, students interacted with organizations and/or social work beneficiaries through digital technologies and delivered new services to the community. For example, students were involved in activities such as operating a helpline for lonely people, supporting frail elderly people and detecting the need in the territory through the implementation of a service to citizens. Some students were involved in the call centers where they recorded requests from beneficiaries, provided information about available resources, or recorded the request and passed information about urgent needs to another department of the organization. Another group of students provided online counseling. In this model, part of the experience was a special preparation for the online services, focusing on developing students' digital skills and providing

first-line psychosocial aid for clients with behavioral issues such as verbal aggression, sadness or grief. Focusing on the reflective units was also important; individual supervision was needed more frequently. In this model, schools could use previous experiences with service-learning and long-term cooperation with the organizations. A participatory planning process with the partners was also integrated in some cases.

4.3.5 Using the Different Online Platforms for Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Another common dimension of all adaptations of practice education was using the different online platforms for synchronous and asynchronous learning.

> All the course tasks and activities have been uploaded to DistEdu, and at any time, students could review the program and other course materials at any time of their choosing, such as videos, assignments, and information about the organizations.

4.3.6 Positive and Negative Aspects

Within the adaptations of social work practice education during the pandemic, we can identify several positive and negative aspects mentioned in the analyzed experiences. See the summary in the Table 4.1.

4.4 Long-Lasting Innovations and Their Values for Social Work Education

Beyond their rather singular character, some of the *experimentations and innovations* could also be path-breaking changes in the practice education programs of the social work schools in 2020–2022 or research projects.

The online survey concluded with the last open-ended question, asking social work schools if they would have done something differently in social work practice education during the pandemic. Of the 126 schools that responded to this question, 52% answered that they would do things in the same way or explained that they think that, given the context, they did their best. Those who would have done things differently gave various answers, depending on the country, institutional context, the social work program, or the COVID-19 measurements. From all the answers, the following reflections were identified as the most crucial ones:

(a) A need for better online learning environments.
(b) A need for better guidance or assessment of students.

Table 4.1 Positive and negative aspects of social work practice education during the pandemic

Positive aspects	**Quotation**
Flexibility	"…the online experience guaranteed more flexibility in time management"
Reducing expenses	"…possibility of reducing travel"
Higher focus on reflection and learning	"…greater space for reflection and study" "More reflective activities" "Bringing to attention the importance and value of theoretical thinking that should guide professional action" "Higher focus on writing competence"
New skills and knowledge	"… the possibility to learn how to face an emergency" "Development of digital skills of students"
New partnerships	"We found new partners"
Solidarity	"The social work community's critical situation created the ground for supporting and increasing solidarity among its members and the new generations"
Increased involvement of supervisors in the whole process of practice education	"The online activities facilitated the participation of supervisors in periodical meetings (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) with academic tutors."
Negative aspects	**Quotation**
Missing direct contact with beneficiaries	"The online experience did not allow direct experimentation with people physically present" "Impossibility of exploring the action at territorial level"
Loneliness	"Loneliness in carrying out all remote activities at home at the PC"
Increased differences among students' paths	"Those who were motivated to live the experience and/or those associated with structured services that had suitable technologies or professionals who were already used to work in an online dimension had a good experience. Students who were shyer and less motivated to engage themselves and/or students who were associated with services and professionals not used to ICT had an elementary experience. We think that the digital divide (also among students!) played a role, but the impossibility for supervisors to actively stimulate less motivated or shy students was also crucial."

Source: The authors

(c) A need to include experts, supervisors, service providers and service users in online activities stronger.

These results confirm the need for many social work schools to reflect on their experiences and to find new ways to ensure a high quality of practice education. Here, the challenge seems to be to reinvent ways to keep students' academic performance and participation in practice education high while investing in the guidance and well-being of students. At the same time, the importance of exploring new collaborations and partnerships to include experts, practitioners and service users in online learning activities should not be ignored.

In the descriptive reports on the creative approaches, all schools perceived the pandemic times as a space for learning and development in several areas. Some

schools also developed adaptations after the pandemic; in some cases, they reflected the need to evaluate experiences more profoundly and, after evaluation, decide about other steps in the implementation.

Schools also reflected that some practices worked very well during the pandemic. Still, they were non-transferable because of the particular situation. For example, online meetings seemed to work better for team meetings of professionals than student learning settings.

> Many of the activities organized during the practice education are workshops and groups to stimulate the reviewing process of the experience: these activities require face-to-face meetings since they are part of the experience. In online practice education, the powerful effect of these workshops and groups was lower than in traditional face-to-face activities.

Despite the limitations of alternatives after the pandemic, we can identify the long-term impact of experiences gained and long-lasting innovations in several areas of social work education. Based on the analysis, we developed a model in Fig. 4.2.

The pandemic has dramatically sped up the digitalization process in social work and social work education. We can conclude from the analysis of practices that

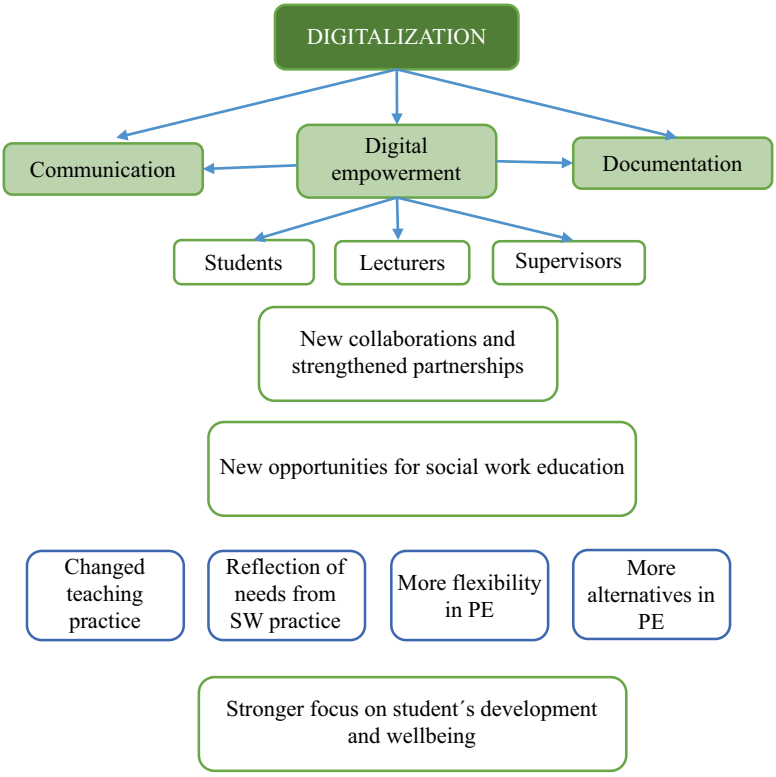

Fig. 4.2 Long-lasting innovations developed in social work practice education during the pandemic. (Source: The authors)

digitalization and using ICT lead to adaptation and innovation used in social work education in several areas.

> Digital media are the medium and connective tissue within which to insert the new professional practice and basic training.

4.4.1 Digital Empowerment

The first area is the digital empowerment of students, lecturers, and supervisors. The growing relevance of digital practices in social work calls for changes in preparation for a new generation of social workers.

> We realized that we need to prepare the students also to be able to provide services online. Our practice education activities can be intended as prefigurative of the future of social work education in so far as they allow to shape a current and future use of ICT within a social work program.

To empower students digitally, we also need to enable lecturers to do so digitally. The lecturing staff was required to adapt quickly during the pandemic to the new online teaching reality. The development of the digital skills of lecturers has a long-term impact. They are more confident using ICT in their teaching. In connection with practice education, "using online applications is more efficient." Social work practice supervisors were also digitally empowered during the pandemic, not only because of their online interaction with beneficiaries and because of the digitalization of their services but also because of their involvement in the innovations in social work practice education during the pandemic.

> The practical methodological role of the supervisor within the framework of digital social work is changed.

4.4.2 Communication

Digitalization and digital empowerment of different actors also influenced communication between actors involved in social work practice education.

> …improvement of our skills in ICT, now can be used to strengthen relationships among the actors involved and increase the possibility to meet with people that can't be present.

Online meetings with supervisors at some universities are still organized to increase the participation of supervisors.

4.4.3 Documentation

Moving social work practice education online also brought changes in the documentation. For this purpose, different online platforms for collecting and inserting the student's documentation (timesheets, meeting minutes, exercises etc.) in online folders are now maintained.

4.4.4 New Collaborations and Strengthened Partnerships

Digital empowerment of different social work practice education actors also brought new partnerships and collaborations and strengthened the existing blocks.

> We signed contracts with new organizations.
>
> …this effort opened our minds and habits to a new way of working, strengthening the relationship between the university, social work community, service providers and students.

Lecturers and social workers shared the same reality of searching for solutions, adaptations, and innovations, and they learned together how to adapt and be proactive.

> Learning to work online strengthened relationships among networks, sped processes, even when facing problems, and helped take care of professional relationships by meeting online colleagues who live far away.

4.4.5 New Opportunities for Social Work Education

Experiences during the pandemic also brought new inputs for social work education in general and in practice education in particular; in some cases, they persist.

> New approaches are still used in teaching the courses.
>
> …some courses were moved online.

Closer cooperation during the pandemic with social workers and reflection on their opinions, needs, and suggestions from practical experience also contributed to the changes in social work education, particularly in practice education.

> It contributed to prefiguring future developments of social work education in the direction of more communication regarding the educational interest of social workers and social programs.

The pandemic has also shown the importance of flexibility in organizing social work practice education. Schools and organizations were forced to look for new possibilities and solutions and to respond flexibly to emerging challenges. In many ways, the insistence on rigid procedures and rules in the changed conditions proved to be dysfunctional, as it turned out that alternatives could generate the same results.

Students, teachers, and supervisors learned that in complex and ambiguous settings, they

> must be flexible and adapt to the context.

The flexibility is also connected to the development of new alternatives in social work practice education or alternatives that proved effective and lasting after the impacts of the pandemic were coped with. It also emerged that practice education can encompass a broader range of activities and can take an online form.

> Students can practice synchronously and asynchronously.
>
> Students who, for various reasons, cannot complete an internship at a specific organization have the opportunity to practice performing creative tasks (for example, to develop and implement a fundraising campaign for a certain group of clients).
>
> Students have the opportunity to practice at their place of residence, not only at their place of study but also remotely in any region of the country, even abroad.

Beyond this, the pandemic has also exposed the fragility and vulnerability of students and lecturers more strongly. It became much more visible that a larger number of them were unable to continue their practice or studies, had to struggle with personal crises and psychological problems, and were in need of professional help. It became apparent that more attention needed to be paid to the *well-being of students and lecturers to find ways to strengthen their resilience and the design of suitable study and work settings in higher education and social work practice*.

4.5 Conclusions for Social Work Practice Education in the Future

Despite the limitations of alternatives during and after the pandemic, we identified the long-term impacts of gained experiences and emerging long-lasting innovations in and for several areas of social work education.

With the rapid shift to remote practice education, information and communication technology intensified due to social or physical measurements (Mishna et al., 2021; critical on this also Chap. 10). Our analyses showed a change towards *more virtual and blended teaching methods and tools in practice education* with social work schools' main challenge of continuing practice education in person or via blended learning and integrating the effects of technology and the internet in these settings. However, we notice progress towards developing new concepts that can integrate learning needs and the possibilities of technology.

We also analyzed the pandemic as an accelerator *for lecturers, students and supervisors to learn new future-proof skills*. A report from Partnership for twenty-first Century Skills (2009) defines the new skills and competences along the following categories: learning and innovations skills, digital literacy skills, and career and life skills for living, working and learning in a globally and digitally interconnected world.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Taylor (2017) identified significant gaps in social workers' digital literacy and awareness of ethical boundaries and relationships on digital platforms, arguing that social workers should pause to consider "digital knowledge gaps" before rushing to drive technology-enhanced practice methods forward. The spread of COVID-19 made such a pause impossible and accelerated the use of digital practice methods. Research shows that hybrid digital social work could be as effective as they were in face-to-face practice (Pink et al., 2022). Also, in social work education, we could embrace new partnerships and collaborations with social work practice and learn from creative and improvisatory modes of engagement with technology demonstrated by social workers, educators, service users and students during the pandemic and shape future-proof frameworks to create an adaptable digital social work practice education that responds rapidly to unknown situations or crises.

Social work education plays a crucial role in gaining and maintaining a high level of professional knowledge and skills for practitioners. As research on professionalism and training needs shows, there is a need to reinforce and innovate social work education to ensure that skills that can be used in professional practice are acquired (Cellini & Dellavalle, 2022).

In our study, we could observe new and creative approaches to practice education within the *continuum of service and learning*, going from volunteering as a service-focused alternative to practice education based on the student's involvement in volunteer activities in different organizations towards a service-learning approach and learning-focused activities of different creative, practical educational activities for students in online settings (individually or in groups).

Most approaches used in practice education during the pandemic still have their current value or are long-lasting innovations. Innovation can disrupt bureaucratization (Ramos-Feijoo et al. 2020 in: Cellini & Dellavalle, 2022). We noticed that some schools described that although some rules or procedures could not be respected, new and innovative approaches were surprisingly effective during the pandemic. However, only some of the creative approaches that were used during the pandemic will also work today and are linked to the dynamic process of continuously adapting and updating social work education.

Research about the impact of COVID-19 in higher education showed that students experienced various situations and feelings affecting their well-being on multiple levels. (Butnaru et al., 2021). Our analyses revealed a need for more awareness of differences between students (resources, vulnerabilities, possibilities), which leads to a *stronger focus on students' well-being and reflection on how we can strengthen their resilience***.** Developing and integrating personal resilience could be a fundamental part of the social work curriculum in the future (Apostol et al., 2023). Strengthening students' resilience is one of the irreplaceable elements of social work education, thanks to which students can apply the knowledge acquired in demanding social work practice and uncertain realities. Using the resilience concept within education also contributes to developing students' professional identity (Punová et al., 2014). The uncertain identity of social work and the unclear

expectations of society from social workers create space for applying the resilience concept, whose strength is the search for new adaptive mechanisms despite the difficulty experienced.

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Part II
Social Work Practice Education in Times of the Pandemic and Beyond: An In-depth Analysis of Inspiring Experiences in Europe

Chapter 5
Social Work Practice Education in Spain During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges for Innovation

Iria Noa de la Fuente-Roldán

5.1 Introduction

The first case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in Spain was reported on 31 January 2020. Its rapid spread caused the Spanish government to declare a state of emergency on 14 March 2020 to restrict the free movement of citizens.[1] The slogan "stay at home" was used as the general public was placed in lockdown, all non-essential socio-economic activities were suspended, and a range of public health and safety measures were imposed. Spanish society was forced to implement different strategies to be able to continue with day-to-day activities, including university education.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the Spanish university system to adjust its curricular programs so that teaching could occur via remote electronic means (Mantulak et al., 2021). As noted by García et al. (2022), these shifts affected the entire university community. They transformed the forms and patterns of student-teacher relationships (Drole et al., 2022). In curricular terms, the need arose to radically adjust subjects, content, and means of assessment (Arundel et al., 2022). This posed a real challenge across numerous degrees, particularly for subjects such as social work that include practice education due to the need for a higher level of practical experience (Vázquez Aguado, 2004).

[1] Royal Decree 463/2020 of 14 March declaring a state of emergency to address the health crisis caused by COVID-19.

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Practice education is a central element of curricular programs for social work undergraduates (Davis & Mirick, 2021). Given its importance, all institutions that offer social work degrees integrate into their curriculum the training of students through external placements, where they have direct contact with social work professionals (Drole et al., 2022).

The social work degree in Spanish universities consists of a total of 240 credits divided into 4 academic years. Placements generally offer 18 ECTS (between 450 and 540 h) for social work qualifications in Spain (Vázquez Aguado, 2004, p. 306). While generally similar, social work practice programs do contain some notable differences, especially in terms of how practice hours are distributed. Some faculties implement the programs during the fourth year of study, and others introduce them at earlier points in the degree, spreading the hours across academic years. This is the case, for example, at the University of Valladolid, the University of Cádiz and Pablo de Olavide University (Seville).

Practice programs involve students attending practice centers, where they are tutored by social work professionals and receive academic supervision from faculty staff. Both of these elements are fundamental in guaranteeing the quality of the degree (De Fries et al., 2021), as they both foster the development of the generic and specific competencies required for the student's future professional performance.

In the context of the COVID-19 health emergency, a wide range of difficulties affected social work placements between 2019 and 2022. In the circumstances defined by restrictions, risks and challenges, Spanish universities had to address the critical issue of securing social work undergraduates' practice education. Few studies in Spain have analyzed the specific impact of COVID-19 in this respect to date. Only the Spanish University Association of Social Work (*Asociación Universitaria Española de Trabajo Social*) (AUETS; Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020) has systematically examined how Spanish universities attempted to meet the challenge of social work placements. This study found a profound transformation from the pre-pandemic approach to curricular placements in the search for alternatives to facilitate the acquisition of key learning and competencies (Andrade-Guzmán & Sepúlveda-Navarrete, 2022).

In this context, this chapter aims to analyze the pandemic's impact on social work practice education by examining the initiatives and adaptations implemented in Spain to facilitate social work placements during the academic years most affected by the pandemic: 2019–2020, 2020–2021 and 2021–2022.

The chapter outlines the scenarios that contextualized social work practice education during these three academic years, describing and analyzing the efforts by Spanish universities in each year and their impact on student training (Sect. 5.2). The chapter then considers the impact of these measures on the affected dimensions (Sect. 5.3). The concluding part of the chapter reviews what has been learned and incorporated as good practices, in addition to noting certain remaining challenges (Sect. 5.4).

5.2 Social Work Practice Education in Spain During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Social work placements are a fundamental pillar of training in the field. But COVID-19 created a difficult context for the implementation of placements, both in the early phases of the pandemic and during the following academic years. The challenges for social work practice education during academic years 2019–2020, 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 are presented below.

The initial challenge in 2019–2020 was defined by lockdown and adjustment to online theory and practice teaching. Most students who were engaged in social work placements at the undergraduate level had yet to complete those placements when lockdown was ordered in Spain. In response, almost 40% of curricular social work placements were shifted to an online format. However, around 20% could not be carried out since they were either canceled without the opportunity for adjustment or had not yet been started (Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020).

In this respect, limited adjustment to online placements was observed during the early stages of the pandemic (data from SWooPEd Project Survey, see Chap. 3).[2] For example, at Complutense University of Madrid (UCM), the decision was made to deem placements completed and passed in the case of social work students who had completed half of the established number of hours (200) at the time lockdown was ordered and in-person educational activity was suspended (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022). Other universities encountered fewer difficulties in this sense, with students able to complete the placement hours established in their curricular programs. This was true of the University of Cadiz and Pablo de Olavide University (Seville, Andalusia). Various issues caused these disparities, including different numbers of students and differing distribution of fieldwork hours across the four academic years of the degree, causing certain universities (e.g. Valladolid, Pablo de Olavide) to be less affected (Pastor-Seller, 2022).

The academic year 2020/2021 in Spain started subject to the provisions of Royal Decree-Law 21/2020 of 9 June on urgent prevention, containment and coordination measures to tackle the COVID-19 health crisis, which required the implementation of social distancing (at least 1.5 meters) and appropriate hygiene measures (article 9).

Curricular social work placements were significantly affected in Spain (as in the rest of the world) at this time. Lockdown and social distancing measures affected the implementation of placements and the availability of professional areas of intervention. As a result, Spanish social work faculties generally proposed a range of placement mechanisms: remote, in-person and hybrid (Andrade-Guzmán & Sepúlveda-Navarrete, 2022). Together with these mechanisms, various potential scenarios were envisaged, involving reduced placement hours, the risk of temporary

[2] The online survey was conducted between April and July 2022 and targeted all social work faculties across several European countries, including Spain, where 23 completed questionnaires were collected. This sample cannot be considered representative and so the results are cited here for exploratory purposes only.

or full suspension of placements, and significant reductions in the number of placements supplied to cover the needs of all enrolled students (García et al., 2022). This restricted supply represented the main challenge imposed by COVID-19 in relation to curricular social work placements.

If anything defined the development of the academic year 2020/2021, it was this shortage of placements, regardless of the mechanism used. Various professional social work associations reported this situation. Institutions and their professionals were urged to assume a "proactive role in seeking solutions to the difficulties that may arise, emphasizing the need to train future colleagues (…) in response to the new social realities that we are facing" (Madrid Social Work Council, 2020). The shortage was so widespread that it was described as particularly important by 8 out of 13 social work faculties that took part in a study by Abolafio Moreno et al. (2020).

Two issues made it difficult to secure an adequate supply of placements. First, the placements that it had not been possible to complete during the previous academic year added to the demand for places in academic year 2020/2021. In fact, there was a 14.3% year-on-year increase in enrolments for placement programs (Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020). Second, the entities that collaborated with the various faculties on practice education faced high levels of pressure; they also had to cope with the individual and social impacts of COVID-19, including issues such as job loss, infection, lockdowns, remote working and closure of centers unable to comply with mandatory safety measures.

SWooPEd Project Survey data (see also Chap. 3) shows that Spanish universities handled these difficulties in various ways. In general, placement programs were adjusted to secure as many hours of physical attendance at placement centers as possible on the same terms as pre-pandemic placements. As it was not possible to offer precisely the same number of hours, the below-outlined adjustments were implemented to compensate for or replace lost time, with students organized into small groups where possible and otherwise attending remotely and mainly in real time (SWooPEd Project Survey data).

Before the pandemic, the procedure for practice placements was standardized across Spanish social work faculties. Before the end of the previous academic year, the people responsible for the practice education of each faculty would contact potential host organizations to enquire about the number of available placements and adjust the supply to student demand. However, in the context of the pandemic, this process was complicated by the inability of institutions to reliably offer their normal level of placements.

This uncertainty meant that throughout the academic year 2020/2021, Spain's social work faculties were forced to engage in an intense and ongoing effort to broaden the supply of placements. This involved diversifying the search for placements to include areas where social work had previously been less common in the context of professional practice (Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020) and establishing new collaboration agreements. For example, in the academic year 2020/2021 alone, the UCM Faculty of Social Work signed more than 30 new collaboration agreements (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022).

Importantly, this situation may have had an impact on the quality of practice education (García et al., 2022). The pressure to respond to student demand has meant that quantitative criteria have sometimes taken precedence over qualitative considerations. There is hence a risk that the generation of social workers currently entering the labor market are doing so with less initial preparation than previous cohorts.

5.3 The Impacts of the Pandemic on Social Work Practice Education: From 2021/2022 to the Present Day

The measures required to tackle COVID-19 have also been reflected in the university dynamic, including practical teaching, as the SWooPEd Project Survey data show. Since 2021/2022, Spain could be said to have returned to something close to the pre-pandemic situation regarding curricular social work placements, particularly regarding the supply of placements, which proved sufficient to meet student demand.

But even in this context of difficulties caused by the disappearing pandemic, the pandemic has brought about a series of educational transformations and innovations that cannot be easily discarded. As noted by Arundel et al. (2022), once the feelings of uncertainty and fear associated with the new, remote form of learning had dissipated, the professionals acting as placement tutors, academic staff and students alike assumed and accepted the "new normal," which has remained in place in many respects. With regard to social work interventions, Nomen (2021) noted that this "new normal" does not mean a return to the pre-pandemic reality. Rather, it incorporates changes and new rules that have had a significant impact on education worldwide, including in the context of practical social work training. It has had at least three major impacts: on the digitalization of social work education and practice, social work students, and social work placements.

5.3.1 The Impact of Digitalization on Social Work Education and Practice

"Remote placements" may not be a widespread option, but they have continued to form part of social work programs in Spain (Andrade-Guzmán & Sepúlveda-Navarrete, 2022). A hybrid placement model has been developed that combines in-person and online teaching and practice education. While this hybrid model is not the general rule, it has particularly arisen due to a need to adjust placements to the workplace reality of institutions where social workers are doing their jobs within the framework of the "new normal" (Nomen, 2021). If these professionals have

supervised placements, they have had to adapt the relevant program to the remote format to make student training possible. In other words, remote working is now part of life for professionals in Spain, making it necessary to adjust the support given to future social workers along the same lines. For example, several "remote practice placement" projects started during the academic year 2020/2021 with the aim of providing telephone and videoconference accompaniment and social diagnosis to citizens have been retained (Pablo de Olavide University, 2021).

The use of remote working technology is now a reality at Spanish universities (García-Morales et al., 2021). Since March 2020 social work placements have been using videoconferencing platforms, learning management systems and online collaboration tools to facilitate information communication and exchange. Similarly, the pandemic has driven the creation and use of open educational resources (Santos-Hermosa et al., 2021). Spanish universities have continued to use their investments to implement online activities and tools for teaching and interaction between professionals, academic staff and students. At some Spanish social work faculties, for example, parts of the seminars and training that supplemented placement hours during the hardest periods of the pandemic continue to be used as teaching materials (data from SWooPEd Project Survey). Faculties have identified this as an innovative good practice that is here to stay (Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020).

In this context, all players (professionals, students and academic staff) have had to develop a range of digital competencies that are not always straightforward or accessible. It is worth noting that although remote resources facilitate certain aspects of learning for future social workers, creating greater flexibility in terms of processes and procedures, there is a digital gap that is key to understanding inequalities in education (de Jonge et al., 2020), meaning that "remote placement" projects have sometimes required universities themselves to provide students with devices and Internet access (Pablo de Olavide University, 2021).

This new scenario poses significant risks for professional performance in a digitalized and online world. Although the adjustment to a "remote placement" model has proven useful, it has had certain important implications for social intervention. While it has been possible to manage some aspects of professional practice online, social work involves interacting with the people with whom intervention is taking place by means of a relationship established in person. This process involves other forms of professional accompaniment in addition to verbal aspects of communication. Spain's General Social Work Council has emphasized the importance of ensuring that social intervention and accompaniment processes take place in person wherever possible (General Social Work Council, 2020). Ultimately, a community presence is fundamental to establishing the basis for relationships that involve supporting vulnerable groups of people who, in many cases, are far removed from the digital skills and resources that the contemporary world demands (Nomen, 2021).

5.3.2 The Impact on Social Work Students

The new educational framework resulting from the pandemic—or from the transformation made to adapt learning to cope with COVID-19—has seriously affected placements and, above all, the reality faced by social work students. This impact has been felt in several directions. First, returning to the needs imposed by the "new normal," some social work students have encountered a significant paradox: the need to tackle situations involving a digital gap in the context of situations involving a digital gap (Regalado López, 2021). From a social work perspective, it is essential to analyze what has happened and is happening when students do not have high-quality smartphones, Internet access or online training (Bracons & Ponce de León, 2021).

Second, curricular social work placements represent the start of the journey toward professional performance (Pastor-Seller, 2022). Linked to this is a reality that is not always acknowledged: the specific stress generated by placements (Facal Fondo, 2017). This stress has increased in the context of the pandemic. Placements play a key role in undergraduate degrees, engendering lofty expectations. Moreover, while the academic burden would ideally not be too heavy while these vital experiences are taking place, this is not always achieved in practice. In this regard, according to Facal Fondo (2017), students assume high levels of stress during the preparation and commencement and in the course of placements. This stress arises from factors traditionally present in academic activity (exam anxiety and stress, need to work, family pressures, etc.) but also from factors linked to perceived academic burden or experiencing a lack of competence to carry out professional work. In fields like social work, there is an added sense of discomfort due to students coming into contact with emotionally complicated and relationally complex situations (Facal Fondo, 2017).

The impact of the measures implemented to respond to COVID-19 on psychological wellbeing among the university students who have had to complete their placements is worth emphasizing in this regard. Various studies have reported that both lockdown and the adjustments made to facilitate remote learning and reinforce training have shaken mental health among students, including in the field of social work (Cabonce, 2022; Cáceres-González et al., 2023; Evans et al., 2021; Martín-Cano et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Pizarro et al., 2022). This brings into focus the importance of universities themselves addressing these difficulties. In other words, a potentially positive impact of the pandemic is that universities are more aware of the psychological wellbeing of their students, and they are developing specific initiatives in that direction.

Since March 2020, the experiences of social work students have been defined by uncertainty over whether they will be able to start or continue placements or have to adjust them to the various changes implemented by universities, with a risk of not being able to graduate (Abolafio Moreno et al., 2020). Despite this uncertainty, students mainly expressed satisfaction with the response from faculties. In this regard, Spanish universities offering social work courses agreed that the main

responses from students included conformism, acceptance, understanding and protest, but above all reflected a flexible attitude towards collaborating in the search for placements (proactive placements). Student collaboration was indispensable in the specific case of UCM. Around 100 of the 370 placement positions required for the academic year 2020/2021 were secured by students (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022), making them much more proactive than in previous courses. Student collaboration has continued to the present; some universities have reported that proactive searching for practice centers has remained at higher levels than before the pandemic. This also implies a change in the relationship between universities and social institutions, involving the incorporation of students as facilitators of the relationship. In addition, these institutions "facilitated" by the students had in many cases not previously offered practice placements, leading to increased collaboration agreements.

This positive approach from students partly arose due to faculty efforts to secure student participation in mobilizing resources and finding solutions (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022). In addition, students had a positive view of the increased timetable flexibility afforded by technological adjustments and recordings, in addition to increased flexibility in terms of knowledge acquisition and organization (Au et al., 2023). Despite these positive aspects, the adjustments that have been implemented have also clearly had a direct impact on the acquisition of professional competencies. In this regard, and despite the efforts made, students in Spain and elsewhere have expressed concern at being unable to acquire the skills needed for direct practice (Au et al., 2023; Andrade-Guzmán & Sepúlveda-Navarrete, 2022; de Jonge et al., 2020). Different experiences have confirmed this perspective among students. UCM's students gave a lower score when assessing the competencies they had acquired and implemented through placements for the academic year 2020/2021 in comparison with previous years. While over 73% of students in the academic year 2018/20219 reported that they were satisfied with the professional competencies they had been able to acquire through their placements (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2019), this percentage fell to 70% for the academic year 2019/2020 and to 68% for the academic year 2020/2021 (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022).

5.3.3 The Impact on Social Work Practice Placements

As Pastor-Seller (2022) points out, practice education constitutes the most important framework for students to encounter professional practice during their academic training. This is borne out by the effort that universities make to organize and implement placements and the responsibility they bear in this regard, which extends to the public and private institutions that collaborate by offering placements to students.

However, this model of collaboration between public institutions and public universities to offer placements appears to have been changing since the pandemic in Spain, and especially in certain autonomous communities.

As mentioned before, Spanish social work faculties have reported experiencing great difficulties in meeting placement demand for all students, despite their extensive efforts to do so. There have been particular problems with regard to public institutions (García et al., 2022). In the case of UCM, while the Community of Madrid had offered 25 placements for the academic year immediately preceding the pandemic, it did not offer a single one for the academic year 2020/2021, when 370 students needed placements. Along the same lines, the City Council of Madrid offered 46 placements in 2019/2020 but reduced the number of places to 29 during the academic year 2020/2021 (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022). The same issue was reported by the University of Barcelona, for example, which had to use training seminars to meet the needs of over 200 students in response to the unavailability of the curricular placements required for the social work degree (Buenaventura Rubio et al., 2022).

To a large extent, public institutions such as hospitals and residential care facilities for older adults were the highest-risk environments in terms of COVID-19 infection. However, the reluctance of Spanish public institutions to collaborate with social work faculties to create an adequate supply of placements extended to other lower-risk spaces, such as social services and education facilities. Public service providers hence appeared to take a more restrictive approach in terms of COVID-19 due to the presence of risks, but also because of more rigid and less collaborative action protocols for tackling the health emergency that was affecting social work placements (García et al., 2022). The emergence of these difficulties at the outset of the pandemic is understandable. However, the supply of public institution-based placements in some Spanish faculties remains restricted even now (Complutense Faculty of Social Work, 2022).

Given this reduced supply, NGOs were left to bear the burden of offering practical training for students. NGOs also imposed many limitations in certain intervention areas, especially those related to health services. Nevertheless, they did offer the majority of practice placements and even took on the supervision of various students. The supply of social work placements provided by private organizations increased in the context of the pandemic and has continued to this day. This reflects the importance of students as an additional resource in social institutions with limited resources, but also the commitment of NGOs to their training.

Moreover, at the same time, there is a demand for a change of model, with institutions (mainly the public) requesting financial recompense in exchange for training students. New challenges have also arisen with the entry into force of the Royal Decree-Law on Urgent Measures to Extend Pensioners' Rights, Reduce the Gender Gap and Establish a New Framework for the Sustainability of the Public Pension System. This legislation makes it compulsory to register students who are undertaking placements with the social security authorities. It also provides that the institutions hosting the placements have administrative and financial responsibility in this regard unless the collaboration agreement expressly states that the obligation lies

with the center responsible for the training offer (the universities). This has required the execution of new agreements so that institutions can be sure that they will not bear the burden and cost of managing social security registration.

Although this issue can be tackled by restructuring the collaboration between universities and institutions, it is still an element that hinders the implementation of practice education, especially in a non-profit sector that tends to have limited resources. The fact is that social work faculties—essentially with the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—adapted and developed curricular placements to ensure the continuity of good-quality higher education in the hope that the application of learning and innovation would more effectively combat the pandemic for future academic years.

5.4 Conclusions

New technologies have changed behaviors and forms of communication. COVID-19 precipitated this change, which has involved abandoning the idea that learning can only take place in the classroom (Bracons & Ponce de León, 2021). This has affected all dimensions of learning, including social work practice education.

The adjustments implemented to adapt practice education for future social workers to the framework imposed by the pandemic have brought advantages and disadvantages. As mentioned above, García et al. (2022) have noted that the main limitations concern knowledge acquisition and learning quality. In this sense, to enable students to graduate, the prioritization of quantitative criteria over the quality of practice centers and the resulting admission of students to centers that were not the most suitable for their training has potentially affected their preparation to be able to join the labor market as professionals.

Despite this, the challenge imposed by the pandemic could also be interpreted as an opportunity. In Spain, the pandemic has offered a chance to change and update teaching and learning methods, meeting a need to integrate information and communication technologies into professional performance as well as into interactions and interventions with members of the public.

The pandemic and its transformations have led to students participating more actively in their training process, above all by searching for practice centers. As mentioned, the network of relationships linking Spanish universities and social institutions has expanded, above all in terms of NGOs. Efforts by NGOs to help universities train their students have confirmed their commitment to strengthening relationships and extending networks.

In addition, as Tomasina and Pisani (2022) have noted, the advantages of the transformations linked to digitalization and remote work include the possibility of improving work-life balance by reducing travel time and making working hours more flexible, thereby offering greater autonomy. In other words, some online meetings or classes can be useful in reducing pressure by offering increased flexibility. Although this may be limited in the case of professional interventions with service

users, it can help improve wellbeing and quality of life while reducing stressors for educators, institutions and students (Acevedo-Duque et al., 2021).

Of many current challenges, two in particular stand out. First, given the efforts made by private institutions, universities need to propose models of collaboration that take into account and formally recognize the work done before, during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Second, a balance must be found between the advantages offered by remote practice education and the need for proximity in terms of relationships and communications. In the context of a profession like social work, it seems unlikely that this proximity can be achieved through an intermediary screen. It may simply be a matter of time before we understand how future generations of social workers will operate in a new social and technological context, including information and communication technologies, where they will have to develop other ways of achieving proximity to users (Pastor-Seller, 2021).

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Chapter 6
A Long-Lasting Innovation in Social Work Practice Education Through Service-Learning in a Virtual Environment Established During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Experiences from Slovakia

Alžbeta Brozmanová Gregorová

6.1 Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe, educational systems were forced to adapt to the new reality of online teaching and learning. This severely affected practical academic specializations, such as social work. Social work is one of the study programs in which significant attention is paid to the practical training of students in cooperation with practice. The closure of universities and organizations providing space for social work practice education due to the establishment of a state of emergency in Slovakia brought the necessity of proposing alternatives to the traditional form of learning in the field. Some students could participate in social work practice education in person, mainly in social services, which established safety measures efficiently, were flexible, and suffered a lack of labor sources. However, this was only possible for some students. According to the Minimum Standards of Practice Education in Social Work (Asociácia vzdelávateľov v sociálnej práce 2014), practice education is essential for finishing the study in Slovakia. Like other schools of social work, in our case at Matej Bel University in Slovakia, we had to deal with finding practice education mainly for the students who were finishing their studies. Therefore, we used our experience at the university with the development of volunteer programs in cooperation with the regional Volunteer Centre (since 1998) and with service-learning (since 2005). In cooperation with a regional Volunteer Centre, we launched the "Ears to the Soul" program—a telephone helpline for lonely people based on service-learning principles, which also continued after

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the COVID-19 pandemic. In this chapter, I present the theoretical background and the main contexts of the program development, the program itself, its evaluation and recommendations for future social work practice education based on the evaluation of our experience.

6.2 Virtual Service-Learning in the Social Work Education

School-based service-learning is an educational strategy that establishes a clear connection between community service and academic instruction (Filges et al., 2022). It can be defined as an approach to teaching and learning that integrates planned educational activities with community service. This approach emphasizes the positive impact on the community and the educational benefits for students. Through service learning, students engage in real-life situations where they can apply their academic knowledge, skills and past experiences to address actual community needs as an integral part of their curriculum.

According to Furco and Norvell (2019), service learning often requires differentiation from other experiential learning practices such as internships, field studies, and volunteer activities. Various authors have proposed different approaches to clarify these distinctions (e.g., Brozmanová Gregorová et al., 2014; Furco & Norvell, 2019; Hill, 1996; Tapia, 2007). The main factors distinguishing service-learning from other service-based experiential learning activities include the focus (service/learning), the primary intended beneficiary (recipient/provider), the type of learning (unrelated/integrated), and the type of service (high/low). Although both service-learning and practice education aim to develop student skills, service-learning is uniquely characterized by its emphasis on giving back to the agency, which sets it apart from field training or practicum experiences typically required in social work (Phillips, 2011).

Service-learning is well-suited for social work curricula because it aligns with the core values of the profession, particularly its commitment to social justice and service (Bye, 2005). It introduces students to communities, situations, and agencies they may work with in the future and allows them to engage in actions promoting civic empowerment (Byers & Gray, 2012). Burke (2011) highlights the potential of service-learning in social work education by emphasizing its civic component, a key aspect already valued within the field. Literature shows that service learning has been widely implemented across various social work content areas, including research, policy practice, and specialized courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Authors such as Cronley et al. (2014), Lemieux and Allen (2007), Nadel et al. (2007), and Petracchi et al. (2016) provide theoretical frameworks, pedagogical models, and discussions to promote a unified language, shared goals, and research on service-learning in social work education. However, despite its long-term use, research indicates that service-learning is often misapplied, with faculty sometimes conflating it with the required field education experience in social work

programs. As a result, the pedagogy remains underutilized and under-researched in social work education (Cronley et al., 2014).

Reflecting on the service-learning concept and its principles and benefits and, at the same time, on the differences between service-learning and practice education, we see service-learning as an alternative form of practice education in social work. The intention is to learn from experience, support students, and ensure mutual benefit for students and the community partner while providing service and learning from experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for physical distancing dramatically accelerated the use of digital practices in education and interaction with service users. It also influenced service-learning and social work practice. In this context, virtual service learning and digital media and technologies in social work were used as creative modes of engagement. Virtual (e-service-learning, electronic service-learning, e-SL, or online SL) is a type of service-learning in which the service or the instructional component takes place partially or entirely online. Virtual service learning was successfully developed for several years and, during the pandemic, emerged as a helpful tool not only to face the instructional challenges related to the new spaces of interaction but also, above all, to address the need to be together, with and for the community, at a time when it was not possible to do it physically. Virtual service learning has different forms (Waldner et al., 2012), and technology can be used in various ways (Culcasi et al., 2022). Virtual service-learning can offer social work education not only as a medium to implement both the service and the learning components but also by providing a route to strengthen the digital competencies of social work students (Zemaitaityte et al., 2023; Mishna et al., 2021) which is an emerging need connected with the digitalization of social work (Pink et al., 2022).

6.3 Description of the Ears to the Soul Program

The Ears to the Soul program was developed as an extreme virtual service-learning program in April 2020 in cooperation between the Social Work Department of Matej Bel University, Slovakia, and the Volunteer Centre, n.o. in Banska Bystrica in response to the situation caused by the spread of COVID-19. I was involved in the role of a coordinator from the university. I planned the program with the person from the Volunteer Centre, n.o., and promoted the program at the university. I was also responsible for student selection and preparation and pairing the students with the beneficiaries. I coordinated university teachers involved as tutors and supervisors, maintained communication with the community partner and prepared documentation and evaluation. The program's first stage evaluation and description are already described in the study by Brozmanová Gregorová et al. (2020); the results are also partly included in this book chapter.

The program was focused on balancing learning and service aims in line with service-learning principles. The need for physical distancing during the pandemic caused increased stress and a sense of helplessness, loneliness, and social isolation

in many citizens in the public. The Ears to the Soul program aimed to help people overcome social isolation, maintain social contact with others, and share their feelings. The program primarily targeted lonely people (seniors, but also people among at-risk groups, such as patients with chronic and oncological diseases and people with cardiovascular and respiratory problems) who felt isolated and needed to maintain contact with another person. For the social work students, participation in the program was offered as a substitute for completing the compulsory practice education. The program aimed to fulfill the educational objective of the practice education in social work defined by the Association of Educators in Social Work in Slovakia (2014), mainly getting to know organizations in social work, the roles and responsibilities of social workers, and different types of social work beneficiaries, develop the ability to self-reflect and work with various beneficiaries, form professional identity and apply theory in practice. The program also targeted the development of student professional competencies: the ability to develop efficient communication, the ability to orientate and plan the process of counseling, and the ability to support and help the self-sufficiency of beneficiaries. A specific focus was also paid to the development of civic responsibility.

Before the program's launch, a preparatory phase involved university teachers collaborating with the Volunteer Centre to establish guidelines for program coordination. This included defining specific steps for program management, outlining roles and responsibilities, creating a manual for students, conducting training sessions, and organizing necessary documentation and contracts. The university primarily focused on student-related responsibilities, while the Volunteer Centre was tasked with duties related to beneficiaries and promoting the program within the target group.

Beneficiaries were selected for the program by the Volunteer Centre. The program was promoted on social networks, but information was also sent to organizations working with different target groups—seniors and disabled people. The target group was people who feel lonely and need to maintain social contact. Some of the beneficiaries enrolled themselves in the program. Some were registered by their family members or social workers who had worked with them in other organizations. In the initial interview, the volunteer center worker mapped the beneficiaries' needs and characteristics, introduced them to the program's rules, arranged an informed consent, and ascertained their idea of the person they would like to interact with within the program. The data from the interview was then uploaded into a document and shared with the university coordinator. Together with the coordinator from the university, they then formed pairs in the program based on this information.

Before joining the program, students completed a registration form and had an introductory interview. They also participated in online training focused on introducing the program's main principles, rules, and the rights and responsibilities of all involved parties (students, beneficiaries, tutors, supervisors, universities, and the Volunteer Centre). The training also covered specifics related to communication with the program's target groups and how to handle challenging communication

Table 6.1 Ears to the Soul program in numbers

Outputs	May–July 2020	February–May 2021	February–May 2022
Number of social work students involved	12	19	8
Number of beneficiaries involved	12	20	14
Minutes of calls	4.178	10.631	10.711
Average minutes of calls per student	348	559	1.190
Number of tutors involved	4	5	2
Number of supervisors involved	2	2	1

situations. Role plays were used to prepare students for their initial contact with beneficiaries. A manual containing a summary of the training information was provided to students. Following the completion of this training, beneficiary-student pairs were gradually established.

The program followed a "one-on-one" format, ensuring personalized attention and consideration for each beneficiary's needs. The student's primary task was to make telephone contact with lonely individuals at least three times per week; the students always initiated these contacts. Students submitted documented calls each week through a Google form, including specific questions and brief reflections and evaluations regarding communications with beneficiaries. Each student was assigned a tutor from the social work department who maintained regular contact and provided consultations when needed (a minimum of one consultation every 2 weeks). Meetings with tutors also offered opportunities to reflect on developing or deepening defined student competencies. A mandatory group supervision component allowed participants to reflect upon their relationships with beneficiaries, including addressing problematic situations. Participation in this phase lasted for 3 months following online preparatory training.

In its final stage, students attended one last online supervisory group meeting, where they concluded cooperation with their respective beneficiaries while submitting written self-reflections alongside evaluation questionnaires. After completing contacts between benefactors and students, the Volunteer Centre conducted interviews to evaluate individual experiences.

We launched the program in three semesters; the summary is provided in Table 6.1.

6.4 Evaluation of the Ears to the Soul Program

The evaluation of the program aimed to determine whether the program met the defined learning and service objectives and to identify the potential and limits of this form of social work practice education.

6.4.1 Participants Involved in the Evaluation

All stakeholders who participated in the program were involved in the evaluation; the number is provided in Table 6.1. The evaluation was designed during the program's planning stage. All participants were informed about using materials from the program for the evaluation research.

Students (39) were from the master's and bachelor's degree programs in social work, as well as from full-time and part-time studies. Beneficiaries (40) were involved in the program as described above. A total of 40 beneficiaries were enrolled in the program, some of which were enrolled in two phases of the program. Of the 40 beneficiaries, 30 were single seniors living at home, ranging in age from 65 to 88 years, 2 beneficiaries with mild intellectual disabilities, 3 with communication disorders, 1 single mother with 3 children, 2 single adults in need of social contact (no further specifics were identified). University teachers (4) were 3 full-time employees in the social work department and 1 doctoral student. Supervisors were also involved as tutors. The program coordinator from the Volunteer Centre also provided the evaluation.

For the evaluation, we used outputs from continuous documentation of calls provided by the students, final self-reflection of students, evaluation questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with university teachers, community partners and beneficiaries. We selected only the parts focused on the learning and service dimensions from the evaluation.

All participants (students, beneficiaries, teachers, and community partners) were informed about the purpose of using the written documentation, self-reflection or interview and the use of its results, and they could also decline to participate. All participants involved agreed to the use of the data for the evaluation. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, we did not mention any names in the evaluation. We employed several techniques to meet the criterion of trustworthiness of the evaluation. In the text, we use the following to document direct quotations from participants, transcribing their opinions and statements with occasional stylistic modifications that do not affect the content of the statements. To ensure reliability we implemented an accurate transcription of the interviews and consistency of the questions. A limitation may be a certain degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of the data since the researcher also acted as program coordinator and, in her interpretation, may project their own lived experiences and perceptions of the program.

6.4.2 Evaluation of the Learning Dimension

We used students' self-reflections, evaluations, and interviews with tutors and supervisors to evaluate the learning dimension. The program was developed in cooperation with the Volunteer Centre, which was not responsible for mentoring the

students. Still, students were informed about the organization during the online preparatory training, when they also met social workers from organizations who explained their roles and responsibilities, mainly in volunteer program development and implementation in cooperation with the different organizations for various beneficiaries. Students reflected that it was

> …beneficial to also get to know this type of social work practice.

Thanks to the direct contact with the beneficiaries and the group meetings with tutors and supervisors, students got to know different types of beneficiaries, and some of them changed their perceptions and attitudes towards them.

> I changed my view of people with disabilities.

> I have found that people with disabilities are sometimes the same but also have a more positive mood than people without disabilities. They can enjoy life even more.

From the continuous student reflection, we could also observe how they developed the ability to reflect on the experience. They critically reflected on their expectations, fears, and processes of the relationship and self-development. One student describes her experience as a "thorny path"; she experienced stress before each interview, but her evaluation of the whole experience is very positive in other parts.

> The journey through this program was winding and bumpy, but as is true in the proverb that the sun comes out after every storm, even in this case, the best came after overcoming difficult moments. In my case, the thorny events could mainly include the stress that prevailed before each phone call with the client. Even after two months, the feeling of being amazed still hadn't passed. The beginnings were skeptical and doubtful. None of us knew exactly what putting the phone to our ear would lead us to and what feelings we would speak. It was palpable. But at one point, the enthusiasm and intimacy broke through, and with them, the conversations became kind, pleasant, optimistic, and blissful. Now, after the end of the program, I can say that the program, on an individual level, undoubtedly reached its maximum emotionally and impressed on the socially sore places and taught me a lot about myself.

An essential space for self-reflection and supervision and meetings with the tutor were also created.

> Supervision helped me to think, to self-reflection, to self-knowledge, to verify the correctness of the approach when working with my client.

Students' self-reflections also documented that they enlarged the ability to develop efficient communication, orientate and plan the counseling process, and support and help the self-sufficiency of beneficiaries. Some examples of the reflections on these competencies:

> I learned to listen actively, to suggest new topics for discussion, to be interested in another person, their life, experiences, etc.

> I learned how to talk to people with disabilities and how to approach them.

> Thanks to working in the program, I practiced communication, perception, empathy, and the ability to listen to other people. I tried possible telephone counselling.

> I acquired the following skills: active listening, the ability to communicate and assertively behave with the ability to respond flexibly to clients' problems and to be able to take a stand, the ability to listen, listen, not judge.

> I have learned to communicate with a client with a serious speech problem, to be patient when working with a similar client.

Students also reflected on understanding specific communication without in-person contact, developing communication skills through the phone and the possibilities of using technologies to support different beneficiaries.

> I learned how to maintain communication without direct contact, without seeing other people only through the phone.

> I develop an understanding of beneficiaries' needs through the phone… I can motivate and help in various situations, not only in person.

> I will be able to use this experience as a counselor in the future, in the distance without personal contact.

From the point of view of connecting theory and practice, we also consider it essential that students can apply what they learned in their study during the program and on the other hand, they also see space for using the knowledge and skills acquired during the program in their further study, profession and personal lives.

All students recommend undergoing the program mainly because they developed professional competencies and feel beneficial.

> A student can be helpful to someone unknown. At the same time, the students can test their reactions in different situations. The students can exceed their limits. The program can teach the students to communicate with strangers. Alternatively, the students can find out which client they would rather not want. The student finds out on various topics how they can develop communication on common topics. Thanks to the program, the students realize the importance of active listening.

Direct contact with the beneficiaries and positive experiences from building the relationship empowered students as future social workers and formed their professional identity.

> I learned how to work with the beneficiary, and it gave me such a spark that I would know and be able to work as a social worker. Successful, high-quality, and the job would be good for me.

The civic dimension of learning from the Ears to the Soul experience was reflected by individual students on different levels: cognitive, affective, skills, and behavioral.

> I learned that such selfless help and, at first glance, perhaps unnecessary, can do a lot. For example, motivating a person to take the courage to make important decisions positively influences others in their surroundings. Incredible what a couple of connections over a mobile network can generate.

Based on the experience, some students decided to be involved in other volunteer programs that the Volunteer Centre offers.

6.4.3 Fulfilment of Service Goals

The service aim of the program was to help people overcome their feelings of social isolation, maintain social contact with other people, and share their feelings. The program met the expectations of all beneficiaries who participated in the evaluation. Thanks to the program, service users did not feel so lonely; they could open up and trust others. The program contributed to their wellbeing.

> I didn't feel so lonely, and I learned to communicate a little more and to open up to others because I'm an introvert, and I'm not used to communicating so often.
>
> It helped me, I sit at home all the time, and it went well to chat with the other person.
>
> I didn't believe it would be so pleasant. It was beyond expectations.
>
> It was good to talk to someone. It made me laugh too.
>
> It helped in my solitude. I am alone, I have health problems, the quarantine was here, everything affected me both physically and mentally, everything affected me. I was looking forward to the phone calls.
>
> I could talk about everything about the theatre, walking the dog, and personal things. Sometimes you need to confide about your problems.
>
> It certainly helped; I was also happier.

Beneficiaries rated the program positively, and all involved in the evaluation would recommend it to others.

6.5 Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Social Work Practice Education

We know that the Ears to the Soul program has only partially fulfilled all the service-learning principles and has several limits as a social work practice education model. However, the program responded to the current needs of the beneficiaries and those of the students and schools in pandemic times and later. The service-learning experience was intentionally incorporated into the academic curriculum, with a clear link between service and educational goals. It included structured opportunities for students to contemplate their experiences and aimed to cultivate students' sense of civic duty. One potential drawback could be that the students may have been more involved in assessing program needs and design, as they mainly took on implementation roles rather than leading activities. From the point of view of practice education, students in the Ears to the Soul program were not in contact with the field instructor or mentor, who has a central role in social work practice education (Bogo, 2006; Lefevre, 2005), so they were not able to meet professionals in the field and see actual work by social workers.

Despite the identified limits, the evaluation indicates that this model of virtual service-learning can successfully fulfill defined learning and service objectives. It offers students close contact with beneficiaries, the space for personal and professional development and the application of theoretical knowledge in practice. Students have a better insight into the challenges faced by vulnerable population groups, precisely to acquire support strategies adapted to the various categories of needs encountered. The evaluation also showed that thanks to the involvement of students in the program, we were able to overcome the lack of direct interactions with beneficiaries and practice activities in social work education during a pandemic, as reported in several studies (see, for example, Apostol et al., 2023; Morley & Clarke, 2020; Davis & Mirick, 2021; Dempsey et al., 2022).

The value of service-learning as a form of practice education is reciprocity. Focusing on practice education not only on the development of students but also on the needs of organizations and beneficiaries and working with community partners can reshape relationships with organizations and mentors, providing space for social work practice education. In this case, the relationship is based on something other than what we as educators need from the organization, but on how we can help each other, share our responsibilities, and contribute to social work development.

The essential component of service-learning is the focus on civic outcomes. Engaging students in the Ears to the Soul program helped develop civic-minded professionals. As stated by McGuire and Majewski (2011), well-designed service-learning courses can be a powerful tool for social work educators to meet the expectations of professional education as well as the civic mission of the profession itself.

The Ears to the Soul program used digital technologies mainly as an instrument (Culcasi et al., 2022) to implement service and learning. Still, the students' reflection showed that they also developed an understanding of using digital technologies in social work, and it enabled them to evaluate better when and how digital technologies and media will best support their practice and judgments. As stated by Pink et al. (2022), understanding this framework would benefit students as future social workers and beneficiaries in the present digital environments of everyday life. It should be future-proofed for rapid responses to unknown disaster situations like pandemics.

We agree with García-Gutiérrez et al. (2021) that virtual education is a powerful tool for teaching and a channel for learning, facilitating the person's social, emotional and ethical development. The problem that we need to avoid is that these are often invisible. Thus, we need to include them explicitly in the design of our virtual training programs. Inclusion of technology in educational modality should follow specific quality criteria such as humanistic orientation, holistic, personal development, meaningful integration of technology and value of virtual education.

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Chapter 7
Some Observations on Social Work Practice Education in Turkey: Changes in the Rules of the Game and the Pandemic and the Maraş Earthquakes as Their Cornerstones

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7.1 Introduction

In Turkey, social work education did not constitute a "discipline" or an "ecole" in the strongly understood sense. For many years (1961–2000), there was only one school present (Hacettepe University), and in the last 20 years, many new schools (more than 90) have arisen, missing the needed educators. Eventually, a complex transition to online practice education came into force when the COVID-19 restrictions occurred. There was a fluid system where new solutions often sought the involvement of new actors other than the present educators. The rapid increase in the number of social work schools, and consequently the growing number of students, created a structural problem. It has been very hard to find host organizations for practice education, and the involvement of new actors through online solutions often contributed to this complexity in a negative sense.

The Turkish experience here will first be analyzed by taking into consideration the singular and rapid development of the institutionalization of social work education in Turkey: concentration in a single institution (from 1961 to 2000, the first phase); the opening and proliferation of more than 90 schools in the following 20 years (from 2000 to 2020, the second phase); and especially the rush after the 2010s; and then focusing on the distressing but evolutionary experience of COVID-19 (from 2020 to today, the third phase), with a special emphasis on the semester in which the Maraş earthquakes had directly affected (Spring 2023).

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After analyzing the complex transitions before, during, and after the pandemic and its uniqueness in Turkey, a brief theoretical remark will be given with Bourdieu's caution regarding the paradox of commensurability. It has been observed that some profound problems, like the lower formal qualification levels of social work educators (in Romania), crisis, violence, and complexity (in Ukraine), or the fluidity of practice education (in the Czech Republic and Portugal), were very similar to those in other countries. Solutions for these problems can only be found in solidarity, with comparative knowledge that emerged from the present SWooPEd Project and with inter-institutional, inter-national, and multilateral support. The key, it will be argued, for such solidarity is to understand and reflect on the rules of the game in different contexts, to try to deal with the problems of commensurability in comparing countries, institutions, and disciplines, and to try to avoid the "*alladoxia*" that Bourdieu warned us about (Bourdieu, 1997; 1998; and Miller, 2003).

The pandemic was a very upsetting, crisis-creating, and fearful event for the whole world, but paradoxically, it contributed to "the change" in many areas, hopefully in a better direction, at least in some areas like increasing resilience, preparedness, and robustness when facing changes and challenges and reinforcement for possible future events. The devastating two earthquakes in 11 provinces in southeastern Turkey (and Syria), Maraş province being the epicenter, happened 9 h apart from each other on the sixth of February 2023 with magnitudes of 7.8 and 7.5, affecting more than 15 million people in Turkey alone. Therefore, in this chapter, the possibility of such resilience will also be discussed in one of its implementations. With the Maraş earthquakes, unfortunately, we are now witnessing another serious crisis and have again turned to online education this spring (2022–23 spring semester). Practice education is continuing in a hybrid form by using both online sources and face-to-face encounters, depending on the situation of the students (whether they are affected by the earthquakes or not and/or obliged to leave Istanbul due to the crises created by the disastrous situation).

For now, all the rules of the game have changed again, but we already have the pandemic experience and have thus learned those rules readily. Nonetheless, students who are directly or indirectly affected by earthquakes are now able to use online resources in ways similar to those used during the pandemic period. Also, the rest can continue their normal practice education freely (face-to-face classes, working/practicing in host organizations, and taking face-to-face supervision) though it is not enforced on them (optional; the choice is left to the students and they can access online sources whenever they want/need even if they are not affected by the earthquakes at all).

These new and mixed practices of the changes and continuities of the pandemic experience in this novel crisis could lead to consistent innovations in a positive sense if studied properly. There are still many difficulties and challenges going along with such a mixed form, including the ones similar to the pandemic period and many new ones (like depending solely on students' will, a lack of motivation for normal education both among students and teachers, and diverse administrative issues between each university and the higher education board). However, it can easily be said that in today's world, major changes are on their way as a result of the

ongoing economic crises in many places, demographic transitions, climate change, disasters, the spread of artificial intelligence (like ChatGPT), and the stages they create.

7.2 The Current Situation of Turkey in and Beyond the Pandemic

The Republic of Turkey was established in 1923, is a social state of law according to the Constitution, and has been a member of the Council of Europe (EC) since its establishment. The country has the status of a candidate country for the European Union (EU); however, unfortunately, the full membership processes have been interrupted in recent years. As of 2022, Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) data confirms that, with a population slightly over 85 million, 82.7% of the population lives in urban areas (both heavy and medium density), and 68.1% of the total population is working age group with a median age, of 33.5. The proportion of the elderly (over 65) is 9.9%. Turkey is going through a demographic transition period where the number of elderly is increasing at a high rate. Still, at the same time, the country also has a vast share of the young population (22%) (Akşit, 2021). The government in Turkey has been advocating pronatalist policies for the past 20 years, which, in turn, has the potential to increase the total fertility rate. Furthermore, Turkey is a transit country for migration, and millions of migrants are living in the country. The main migrant group is the Syrian people, where there are roughly 3.7 million under temporary protection, 75% of whom are women of childbearing age and children. In addition, there are 1.7 million foreign internationals and roughly 5.5 million people living in Turkey as refugees and migrants (documented by some sources; an additional 1 to 1.5 million undocumented migrant people are also present), who are mostly young. Therefore, in addition to its demographic aging and transition, the young population also increases with the ongoing refugee and pronatalist population policies. In parallel, the unemployment rate, especially in the young population, is high (19.4%), and inflation badly affects the economy. According to the data (TUIK), the year-end inflation rate for 2022 was 64.27%.

The inflation rate has increased seriously since the beginning of the pandemic, which has deepened poverty for both the elderly and the young. The study "Deep Poverty and Access to Rights during the Pandemic Period Research" (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2020) shows that 49.5% of the families interviewed received economic support. The relative poverty rate in Turkey was 14.4% in both 2020 and 2021 (50% of the equivalent household disposable individual median income) (TUIK, 2022). Concerns about a rising need for financial support, particularly the decrease in undergraduate education and students, can be attributed to this profound poverty. Thus, the at-risk poverty rates showed that mainly illiterates (27.7%) and literates with no degree (24.4%) were poor, and the figures changed respectively (at degrees lower than high school, the unemployment rate is 13.8%; at the high school level,

7.8%; whereas higher education graduates were the group with the lowest poverty rate at 2.6%) (TUIK, 2021; 2022). With the highly increasing prices of schooling and accommodation, the poor were becoming unable to school their children more often than before. In other words, the children of poor families were unable to continue their education or had to drop out of school at some point because of economic issues more often than children from families with higher incomes did. As poverty deepens, graduation levels fall, and a big need emerges for better financial support for students. There is no data about the poverty levels of high school graduates attending a university, nor is there data on poverty among higher education graduates. However, according to the news in the media, protests about poverty, low levels of scholarship funding, credit facilities, and insufficient housing are increasing.

Additionally, the mean annual income for those who are employed was calculated as 68,229 Turkish Liras (TL) for higher education graduates, 47,326 TL for high or equivalent school graduates, 35,44 TL for those with less than a high school education, 25,911 TL for those who did not graduate from a school, and 19,835 TL for illiterate individuals (TUIK, 2021). In 2021, compared to 2020, the highest increase in income (at the main job) was observed in illiterate individuals at 18.2%, and the lowest increase was in less-than-high school graduates at 7.6%. Here, the fact that the earnings of those who have not received any education and are only literate are increasing more than those who have received an education, especially those with a bachelor's degree, should be highlighted.

In the context of the highest increase in the annual income of illiterates and the lowest increase in the annual income of less than a high school graduate and graduates with bachelor's from the faculties being in-between, this presents a paradoxical situation. If this were just an incidental development in 1 year, it could have been ignored. The fact is that university graduate professionals, including social work bachelors, employed in the state sector continue to have lower income rises compared with minimum wage increases. Although we do not have current research on these actual developments, I am afraid this will harm the graduates and students of social work programs. With the increasing prices of undergraduate education and the decreased income of undergraduate education, as of 2023, the salary between blue and white-collar[1] workers is no longer so much different from the minimum wage. As of 1 July 2023, the monthly minimum wage was increased to approximately 11,402 TL (439[2] US dollars) net. This situation will cause a serious loss in the rate of undergraduate education enrollment, with the increase in schooling prices, rents, accommodation, transportation, and other living costs, while neither the children from blue nor white-collar families are expected to pay anymore. When the social work students are concerned, as they come mainly from blue or

[1] As of July 4 2023, an increase in the salary of white-collar workers was expected since there was a meeting of the related commission, but contrary to the expectations, the increase in wages remained very low (7%) compared to inflation rate.

[2] As of July 12, 2023.

white-collar families (especially the latter),[3] we must evaluate the future student numbers accordingly. There is even a risk of closing some departments due to a lack of student numbers, especially in private sector or foundation universities.

When considering poverty rates in terms of household types, it can be seen that one-person households had the lowest poverty rate, and correspondingly, extended-family households had the highest. In these families, there is the burden of caring for the old, disabled, and sick individuals, and the economic burden and the marginal value for those who are studying may make these individuals skip education and shift to jobs in the agriculture or construction sectors, which are more lucrative, instead of getting a higher education. The transfer of care for the elderly, disabled, and sick individuals to families in Turkey is a social problem that needs to be discussed further. Still, it creates a situation that causes the youth to shift to insecure jobs without the education they need, which then increases youth unemployment in education-needed secure jobs in the end. Gradually, the rate of getting a bachelor's degree is falling, the cost of getting an undergraduate education is rising, people working in areas such as social work cannot be employed, and the burden of care is transferred to the family, creating a vicious circle.

All the data presented above are taken from the Turkish Statistical Institute's Income and Living Conditions Survey (TUIK, 2021), and Poverty and Living Conditions Statistics (TUIK, 2022) are provided here to highlight the current situation in Turkey, where there is a deep problem with increasing poverty. The closure of the gap between blue and white-collar workers creates a situation in which both of these groups are economically unable to afford education for their youth. This creates a big problem for the universities and the continuity of some departments or even faculties. In addition, all the economic and social burdens of these vast problems are on the shoulders of families.

The employment of social work graduates in their field is decreasing daily. Open education faculties with a very high number of students, an increase in the number of educational institutions related to social work, an increasing number of two-year associate degree open education social work departments, as will be discussed below, and the decrease in job openings by the public sector create a labor supply excess. Research indicates that the biggest challenge faced by social work graduates in the job search is "inexperience" (Artan et al., 2021). Their inexperience may be due to the pandemic, where practice education could not be continued in its former and previous sense. In the next section, we will try to focus on these problems by investigating the experience of social work education in Turkey from a historical perspective, including the pandemic times and beyond.

[3] For example, in our department (which is in a private-sector foundation university), more than half of the parents are from white-collar working families (54%), and the sum (blue and white-collar in total) is 65%.

7.3 The Three Phases of Social Work Education in Turkey[4]: The Need for Qualified Social Work Graduates

Social work education in Turkey started in 1961, as advised and led by the United Nations headquarters in Turkey. The Department of Social Work, which initially provided education under the Ministry of Health, was later transferred to Hacettepe University. It became the only department that taught social work until the 2000s, a.k.a. "the first phase." In the 2000s, social work departments began to pop up in different universities, and especially after the 2010s, it can be said that there was "a rush" to open social work departments. As of 2021, there are 67 social work departments giving education, 51 of which are in state universities and 16 are in foundation or private-sector universities. In addition, there are three non-formal programs in three state universities, two for open education and one for distance. Currently, 13 of the 16 "social work" departments in the private sector are in Istanbul (including our department). As of the 2022–2023 academic year, the total quota in social service programs is 6.406, approximately 30% of which is given to open education programs. There are 91 social work departments, but 24 of them are inactive, so as of 2023, there are 67 social work departments in 66 different Turkish universities.[5] The rapid increase in social work departments caused a shortage of qualified teaching staff, which negatively affected the quality of education. As of 2021, there were 390 lecturers, including 47 professors, 23 associate professors, 74 lecturers with doctorate degrees, 119 lecturers without a doctorate, and 127 research assistants in social work departments (Saruç & Aslantürk, 2021, 426).

Despite the rapid increase in the number of departments, as stated above, there is a significant gap between the number of graduates and employment possibilities, and the employment rates for social work graduates are at a downfall. The public and private sector positions for social workers are mostly already occupied, and new job openings are very few due to the economic crisis. Between 2000 and 2020, "the second phase" of social work education, and especially after the 2010s, the newly opened departments employed many interdisciplinary academicians as a result of the high needs (due to the requirement, at least four members were needed for each department). According to a study conducted in 2016, 70.3% of the faculty members working in existing programs are from different departments, and only 29.7% of the members are social work graduates (Alptekin et al., 2017). The discussions around the issue of interdisciplinary faculty members in social work departments and the social science community in general continued and strengthened gradually. It can be argued, although that cannot be generalized to all interdisciplinary staff, the supposedly low qualification level of the educational board is not solely due to

[4] This part is based on the revised and updated version of the text of Background Country Analysis of Turkey, which was prepared for the SWooPEd Project as a requisite for the participant countries, available to all of the project teams. The text was originally written at the beginning of the project, by the Turkish team, including the writer of this chapter.

[5] There is more than one department in one university under two different faculties.

the interdisciplinarity of the social work academics but to the regulations of the social work education system "the rules of the game"[6] itself.

Today, a third phase started during the pandemic, and with the economic threat for private sector social work departments, the rules are changing again. The student quotas of these private sector universities are decreasing, and social work students are seen as gratuitous as the interdisciplinary staff itself, albeit the latter would be the first to face the possibility of losing their jobs. In the "rush" period, many of these academics were given the responsibility of even practice education, and they became skilled and experienced in time[7], and now the restrictions begin directly in practice education itself because of its immanent nature in the field. The criticisms and discussions regarding interdisciplinary professors mainly target their "lack of qualifications" in practice education.

On the other hand, an important reason for social work graduates' lack of qualifications is the two-year education opportunities. From the beginning, the social work department's education period that provided undergraduate education was 4 years (eight semesters) in Turkey, and a bachelor's degree was awarded. However, starting in 2008, some universities opened 2 years (four semesters) of associate degree open/online education in the social work field; by 2017, their number reached 42 (Apak, 2018: 249). All during this time, these developments led to much debate, discussion, and criticism in the social work community, not only because of the shortness of 2 years but also because it is only online education without practice education. With the pandemic, the criticism directed at two-year associate degree programs lost its force. After the end of the COVID online education period, criticism directed at two-year open education programs resumed for a short time, but then, unfortunately, the Maraş earthquakes interrupted the discussion, but the criticism will surely start again.

"The rush period," it can be said, has come to an end with the pandemic, disasters, and economic crises, and the bill of enlargement is waiting to be paid. The third phase, it can be argued, can very well be the stage for a shrinkage of the social work departments, and in the end, presumably, only the most qualified and equipped will stay. This change, on the one hand, has the power to make the field of social work more robust, resilient, and prepared for future crises. However, if it turns into a hunt solely of interdisciplinary academics, independent of their qualifications, and detecting only if the academic staff is a social work graduate or not, then, sadly, the problem of the low qualifications of the educators will resume, even after the potential layoffs.

Another possible reason for the low qualification level could be the problems with the social work curriculum itself. Hacettepe University switched to a generalist

[6] I am also a private sector interdisciplinary social work academician myself, and facing this threat increasingly day by day.

[7] In Turkish, we have a special word for people who do not get the proper education for something but gain the know-how of it in the field, by doing it for a long time (*alaylı*) that cannot be translated to English easily. These educators are called *alaylı* in Turkey, but another synonym for the word *alay* is to mock. Therefore, sometimes the word is used to mock these people too.

education approach only in the 2000s, and the newly opened departments have largely adopted its curriculum as an example. Even though the curricula are adapted to the generalist model, there are serious criticisms that the differences between the course mediums, places, contents, and hours of the courses in each curriculum, especially on the issues related to social work intervention methods and field practice, create a scattered image, and that some programs even organize course contents and courses according to the areas of interest of the academic staff (Alptekin, 2021, 50f.).

The first postgraduate education program in social work started in 1969 (Karataş & Erkan, 2005). With the increase in undergraduate departments, graduate programs have also become widespread. Currently, 21 universities offer postgraduate education, seven of which also have doctoral programs. It is possible to say that qualification issues are present in undergraduate education as well as graduate education. The social work curricula consist of modules for social work theory, human rights and social work, ethics, values, and profession, as well as the theories covered in related disciplines of sociology, psychology, health, law, philosophy, anthropology, demography, cultural studies, international relations, and qualitative and quantitative research methods. Besides, there are important topics such as gender, aging, disabilities, forensic social services, etc., available in the courses.

Most social work departments providing undergraduate education include practice courses named social work practice, field practice, or internship in their curriculum. During these courses, students are placed in institutions offering social assistance and services, typically in the seventh and eighth semesters. They are expected to practice under the supervision of an institutional consultant and an educational consultant (while using supervision). According to the National Core Educational Program of Social Work, field application comprises 30% to 40% of the training program per national training standards. These rules are developed by the Social Work Schools' Association (SHOD), and they are trying to standardize them (to a minimum of 500 h), involving the student, educational consultant, institutional consultant (an experienced social worker working in the relevant institution), and the implementation institution.

The rules of field practice (duties and responsibilities of the educational counselor, institutional counselor, student calendar, procedures, record keeping, field education supervision, etc.) are determined by a guide (handbook) developed by each social work department. The field application aims to put the social work knowledge, skills, and value foundations into practice and integrate them within the practice. Within the framework of the generalist approach, in field practice, the students, under the supervision (professional management) of an instructor, get to know the institution and the area it serves, observe the services provided in the institution and the functioning of the institution, participate and perform individual, family, group, and community-oriented social work interventions within the scope of the possibilities in the institution. One of the expectations in the implementation process is to learn how social work's values and ethical principles are constantly taken into account, how they are put into practice, and safeguarded and developed in terms of service areas. Within the scope of the courses related to field

applications, students have the opportunity to get to know the relevant problem area and learn about the services provided, the functioning of the institution, and the corporate culture beyond confronting the client group in an institution that provides a social service. Furthermore, in the corporate environment, they develop the skills of recognizing and expressing themselves, communicating, assuming professional responsibility, observing, evaluating, developing appropriate intervention strategies, planning, implementing, and recording.

Lastly, one of the most important problems experienced in practice courses is the difficulty of finding an institution for students to practice **in** due to the rapid increase in the number of departments and the fact that many students have to practice in an institution at the same time. Also, a large number of students can be sent to only one institution, especially in small cities, due to the low number of social service organizations. Similar problems are also experienced in big cities. For example, due to the high number of departments in Ankara and Istanbul, students sometimes have to be sent to institutions without a social worker already employed. On the other hand, it is also very possible to say that social workers or other social professionals who already supervise students in institutions are not always sufficiently experienced and qualified.

In summary, social assistance, social work practices, and both undergraduate and graduate education have important structural issues in Turkey, some of them similar to the ones of other countries involved in this project. The fluid system (constant changing of the rules of the game) allowed the involvement of new actors when needed, but without the preparation and qualifications. These changes did not start with the pandemic in Turkey, but with the rush of opening social work schools after the 2010s, and now, after the pandemic, we are witnessing new disasters. The lower qualification levels of social work educators are similar to those of Romania. Still, the complexity of the social work system, or the fluidity of practice education, resembles Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Portugal, where the solutions to these vast problems can only be found through solidarity, thinking collectively and by being able to look from different perspectives.

7.4 Conclusion: Using the Knowledge of the Rules of the Game as a Means of Solidarity

As we have all witnessed, the past 3 years have been a time of tremendous changes. The pandemic was maybe the most important social event that caused many changes, one of which is the increasing globalization and the commensurability of nations with their attitudes towards the pandemic. Their attitudes were mostly impacted by the rules and regulations of the national governments (they are conceptualized as "the rules of the game" in this study), which changed and shaped their reaction to the pandemic.

Against the ethnocentric views of the investigation of the changes in the rules of the game in the nations involved in this project, in this chapter, we tried to adopt and contribute to a more culturally relativistic standpoint. This is an approach that Pierre Bourdieu has developed throughout his social scientific field research career (e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1997; 1998; and Miller, 2003).

In "Passport to Duke" (1997), he emphasized that a social scientific point of view and related concepts emerge from the history of the economic, political, cultural, and social conditions of each country and the history of the interaction of social scientists in the institutions of each country. While applying these concepts in other countries, instead of assuming commensurability and uncritical universality, one should be careful of "*alladoxia*" (Miller, 2003). There is no guarantee for universality and commensurability without unceasing critical rationalist and evidence-based research and application struggles within and between social science disciplines, within various professions, locally and globally. Therefore, in social work education and practice, educators, students, graduates, policy implementers, practitioners, and service users, while striving for equal access to services, should also be in solidarity with the surrounding actors who have the needed perspectives. Without them, neither the game nor any change would be adaptable to the new stages, and we would all fall victim to false beliefs, especially in times of crisis.

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Chapter 8
Continuities and Innovations in Social Work Practice Education in Ukraine: Lessons from the Pandemic and War Context

Olena Chuiko, Valentyna Shkuro, and Tetyana Semigina

8.1 Introduction

Social work practice education in Ukraine has witnessed significant developments since the emergence of professional social work in the 1990s. As a post-socialist country of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited the welfare paradigm and has been gradually shaping the field of social work in response to evolving social service needs (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Lyons, 2018). While the profession is not yet regulated, social work education has evolved in parallel with the growth and transformation of social services in the country.

The chapter explores the resilience and adaptability of social work practice education in Ukraine, with a specific focus on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion. These crises have underscored the importance of professional social work and the need for effective practice education to prepare future social work professionals to address the complex challenges faced by individuals, families and communities, especially in the crisis context.

Our research was built on the idea that practice education serves as a transformative learning experience, facilitating the personal and professional growth of social work students (Caspersen & Smeby, 2021). Through their engagement with clients and communities, students become more attuned to the social, economic, and systemic factors that impact individuals' well-being and the functioning of

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communities. They gain a deeper appreciation for social justice issues and develop a commitment to advocating for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

This research project aims to address the gaps in the current literature on arranging field education emergencies. The subsequent sections of this chapter provide contextual information on Ukrainian social work education, detail the research methodology, present the findings, and offer recommendations.

8.2 Social Work Education in Ukraine: Accomplishments and Challenges

The development of social work in Ukraine has indeed marked a significant institutionalization of the profession over the past three decades. While it may have been initially perceived as a "new profession" (Ramon, 2000), the field has made substantial progress in establishing a formal system aligned with the pan-European model of vocational and higher education (see Fig. 8.1). There are different levels of social work higher education in Ukraine, including undergraduate (bachelor's), graduate (master's), and postgraduate (PhD) programs.

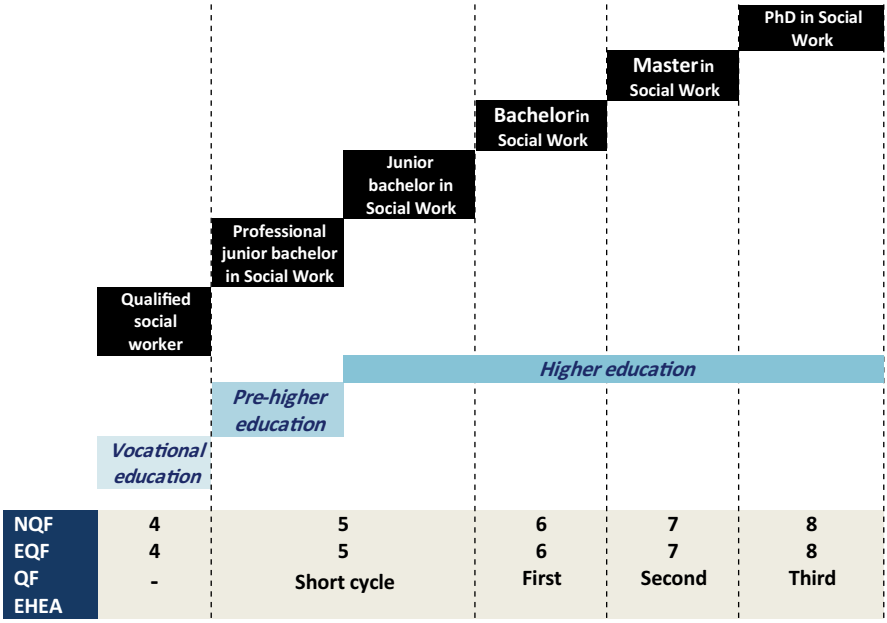

Fig. 8.1 Levels of Social Work Education in Ukraine in 2023 (in comparison to the National Qualification Framework/NQF, the European Qualifications Framework/EQF, and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area/QF EHEA). (Source: Authors)

Social work education in Ukraine adheres to the state educational policy, which promotes competence-based approaches. The undergraduate programs in social work typically span 4 years and provide students with a comprehensive foundation in social work theory, methods, and practice. Upon completion of the undergraduate degree, students are equipped to work as social work practitioners in various settings. Graduates of the master's programs should be prepared for advanced practice roles, leadership positions, and research in social work (Semigina & Boyko, 2014).

Yet, the readiness for practice among social work graduates in Ukraine has been a subject of concern (Slozanska, 2018). Factors such as limited practical experience during education, insufficient supervision, and inadequate exposure to real-life social work contexts may contribute to this readiness gap.

Social work education in Ukraine follows national standards set by the Ministry of Education and Science from 2019 to 2022, outlining competencies and learning outcomes. However, these standards lack curriculum and field placement guidelines, leading to variations in practical education quality among institutions.

Research (Korniat, 2022; Semigina, 2022) conducted in Ukraine prior to the pandemic and war highlighted several challenges related to organizing field internships in social work education. One key issue was the scarcity of social workers as specialists available to supervise and mentor students during their field placements. The limited number of qualified social workers in practice settings created difficulties in finding suitable placement opportunities for students.

Another challenge was the mismatch between social institutions' activities and the roles of social workers. This misalignment hindered the development of essential skills during field placements. Some social institutions hesitated to hire social work students as interns due to concerns about readiness and limited supervision resources.

The process of arranging practice education in social work programs in Ukraine has often been characterized as heavily bureaucratic, involving numerous administrative requirements, contracts, and permissions. As a result, a formal approach prevailed, leading to a lack of expected outcomes.

Prior to the pandemic and the Russian invasion, practice education in social work programs accounted for only a small portion of the overall curriculum, with research suggesting that approximately 5% of the entire program was dedicated to practical training (Semigina, 2020).

In summary, the institutionalization of social work in Ukraine over the past three decades has brought significant progress in aligning with European models of education. However, concerns persist regarding the readiness of social work graduates to enter professional practice, attributed to limited practical experience and inconsistencies in field placements.

8.3 Methodology

The research is based on the *rapid appraisal approach*. This approach helps develop a preliminary, qualitative understanding of a situation (Beebe, 1995). Triangulation of data collection was applied, as well as analysis by a team of three individuals with different academic discipline backgrounds.

To gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of social work educators and students during these crises, specific research techniques were used. The utilization of semi-structured interviews with "critical informants," a small-scale online survey, and the desk review of available official information and research reports provided an understanding of the continuities and innovations in social work practice education in Ukraine.

In May–June 2023, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 university teachers (critical informants) from 12 universities in Ukraine. The universities represented all regions of Ukraine: Three institutions from the West region, five from the Central region, one from the North region, one from the South region, and two from the Eastern region. The interviews were conducted through Internet communication platforms such as Zoom.

Criteria for selecting informants included: (1) being a lecturer or head of the social work department at a university; (2) being involved in practice education arrangements; (3) willingness to discuss practice education in the context of war and pandemic.

These interviews provided a platform for educators to share their experiences, insights, and innovative strategies in adapting practice education to crisis contexts (both COVID-19 and war). The answers were evaluated on the indicators of expansiveness—conciseness, depth—superficiality, analytical—formal; semantic analysis was to comprehend, compare, and summarize the respondents' facts.

To complement the thoughts of "critical informants," we used data from the online survey of students ($N = 60$) from three universities. It was conducted in December 2022 via the self-reporting Google form. The questionnaire provided an understanding of students' experiences and perceptions of practice education during the war and their involvement in social services provision.

To ensure ethical considerations were addressed, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Any personal identifiers were removed or anonymized during data analysis and reporting to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' privacy.

Moreover, the retrospective document analysis was used to examine relevant policy documents, statistical data and practice journals related to the educational provisions during these crises. The desk review was aimed to enrich the picture and place the key informants' visions in the broader context of the national response to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The analysis process involved peer debriefing and consultation to enhance the rigor and validity of the findings.

8.4 COVID-19's Impact on Ukrainian Social Work Practice Education

In 2020, like many other countries, Ukraine had to react quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing relatively strict quarantine measures. These measures had a significant impact on the recipients of social services as well as on social workers themselves, who had to adapt to providing social services in unfamiliar formats and reducing certain social programs (Bobrova & Lomonosova, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns disrupted the usual organization of educational processes in higher education institutions. It presented significant challenges to social work practice education in Ukraine. The sudden transition to remote learning and restrictions on in-person interactions created obstacles in social work practice education. Direct contact with clients and hands-on experience in real-life social work settings became limited. To overcome these challenges, traditional field education approaches emphasizing in-person engagement and observation had to be quickly adjusted to suit the new circumstances.

The interviews with university lecturers demonstrate that their institutions did not cease social work practice education during the pandemic. Depending on the epidemiological situation and quarantine restrictions in the region, practice education was conducted in both online and offline formats. None of the higher education institutions canceled practice education for social workers. However, during the strict quarantine restrictions, there were changes in the practical activities students must complete. For example, case management was changed to case analysis.

As the COVID-19 pandemic persisted, higher education institutions, students, and practice sites embraced greater flexibility in their approaches. Analyzing interviews conducted with representatives from 12 social work schools across Ukraine, several innovations were identified to enhance students' practical education.

Digitalization played a crucial role in transforming students' practice education at various levels. Practice placements adapted by exploring ways and methods to deliver social services online, involving interns in these activities. Educational institutions modified their methodological guidelines and other regulatory documents to support online practice learning alongside implementing digital document management systems.

Teachers and supervisors also underwent changes, with efforts focused on improving their ICT skills. Additionally, online platforms were either created or enhanced to facilitate communication, supervision, and access to educational resources.

Many social work students encountered difficulties in accessing stable internet connections and suitable technological devices, impeding their full engagement in remote learning activities and virtual field education. They were also encouraged to follow safety and hygiene protocols while using computers, particularly considering the needs of students with disabilities. Moreover, students' mental well-being was prioritized, and stress-relief techniques were emphasized to support their overall health.

Overall, these digital adaptations aimed to foster a dynamic and effective learning environment despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The next innovation is focused on *the collaboration between universities and social services.* This involved several aspects:

- For practice sites, there was an emphasis on adapting existing services or creating new ones to accommodate online possibilities and comply with current quarantine measures. This adaptation ensured the continuity of practical experiences despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.
- For teachers and educational institutions, establishing partnerships with active organizations became crucial. The aim was to design practice formats that allowed students to engage with real-world scenarios. Supervisors from educational institutions sought organizations where practical skills could be acquired online, while adhering to quarantine restrictions and prioritizing health considerations.
- For students, online learning provided an opportunity to secure practice placements in their local areas rather than being limited to placements in the city of their educational institution. Students could also gain insights into employment prospects and social work demands, not only in larger urban areas but also in their hometowns.

Based on the interviews and desk review, it is evident that pandemic restrictions led to universities' introduction of new internship models. The following observations were made:

- Within educational institutions, opportunities for practice education were created through various initiatives. These included projects implemented by student self-governing bodies and specialized educational centers. The integration of theoretical and practical education was achieved through community-oriented learning, which yielded effective results. For example, students have started their internships at the Inclusion Center at the University, assisting students in adapting to the learning process, particularly first-year students or students with disabilities.
- Some universities have considered volunteering as an alternative to formalized practical education. For most, volunteering was organized concurrently with internships, or volunteering was focused within the framework of a specific academic course. Furthermore, some educational institutions established volunteer platforms as a meeting place for organizations in need of volunteers and students who were interested in volunteering. These platforms offered students the chance to gain practical experience and contribute to addressing current social issues through community-oriented learning.
- Informants stressed that relying solely on the online format is inadequate for developing essential practical competencies, particularly among junior and bachelor-level social work students. Hands-on experience and direct interaction with professionals are not fully replicable online. The limitations of the online format pose challenges to the comprehensive development of practical skills:

> *Modern ICT technologies make theoretical learning more interesting and interactive. However, the quality of practice education decreases due to the inability to observe the activities of professionals and be part of a professional community. Even informal communication with professionals is important as it contributes to the development of soft skills. The inability to interact with clients, establish rapport, analyze situations, and provide quality social services hinders the acquisition of necessary professional competencies.*[1]

All in all, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the introduction of new technologies and online platforms for social work practice education in Ukraine. Educators and students have demonstrated resilience and creativity in finding solutions. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these forced innovations. Despite their efforts, social work students were unable to fully acquire all the competencies defined by the academic and occupational standards adopted in Ukraine.

8.5 The Armed Conflict and the Disruptions in Educational Provisions

Since 2014, Ukraine has been engaged in an undeclared Russian-Ukrainian war. The armed conflict has gone through several phases and is characterized by its hybrid nature, as it is conducted not only in the form of open military confrontation (Semigina, 2019). The response of social work during the active phase of the war in 2014–2015 revealed weaknesses in the Ukrainian model of providing social and psychosocial support, unpreparedness in working with internally displaced persons, the social and psychological rehabilitation of war victims, and effective work with ex-combatants (Semigina et al., 2021).

The full-scale invasion of Russian forces into the territory of Ukraine in February 2022 is not just an occupation of territories and the destruction of infrastructure. It has resulted in a humanitarian crisis in the country, including the displacement of a significant number of people to other regions and abroad, collective trauma, and the need for adaptation to the consequences of the conflict (IOM, 2022).

The interviews and desk review (Kurapov et al., 2023; Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023; Nikolaiev et al., 2023; Popovych et al., 2022; The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, 2023) evidence that the armed conflict has had a profound impact on the country's educational system.

- With the onset of full-scale invasion, the educational process in higher education institutions came to a halt. On average, from April 2022, the resumption of classes began (some universities resumed activities as early as mid-March 2022, depending on the territorial location of the institution).
- As a result of military actions, numerous educational institutions, including higher education, vocational, and secondary education establishments, have been

[1] Here and afterwards, the text in italics represents direct quotes from the interviews conducted with informants representing social work schools.

damaged or destroyed. As of June 2023, 75 HEI and 126 VET institutions have been affected or destroyed. The armed conflict has forced the relocation of some universities.
- The quality of education has decreased.
- Students have faced various mental and emotional challenges exacerbated by limited access to the Internet.

The interviews evidence that a crucial first step involved establishing contact and determining the whereabouts of students and teachers (as each of them may be in different places within the country or abroad) as well as *ensuring the safety of students and teachers* in practice education.

Students located in Ukraine successfully completed their internships in social work organizations, primarily utilizing offline methods, in contrast to the COVID-19 period when it had already shifted to an online format.

According to the informants, particular emphasis was placed on addressing the needs of students trapped in the occupied territories (after February 24, 2022) and unable to leave. In these circumstances, measures were taken to enable them to carry out their internships in their current location. Similarly, students who were abroad were provided with the opportunity to identify social work organizations in their place of residence:

> *The majority of students residing abroad actively engage in volunteer and community organizations that provide help to displaced individuals from Ukraine. Additionally, partnerships have been established with international organizations that are willing to accept students for internships.*

Because instructors and students were located in different towns and cities across the country, it provided an opportunity to establish partnerships and foster collaboration with social work organizations, thereby *expanding the geographical scope of the partnering organizations.*

Some social work organizations also experienced displacement and continued their activities in other regions of Ukraine. However, their partnership with universities remained intact:

> *The organizations with which cooperation agreements were established for practical training also became "displaced." Finding them, establishing communication, or developing new partnerships on-site was also necessary.*

Many students and teachers abroad have joined organizations working with refugees in their places of residence to support them.

The informants also mentioned that certain international organizations have facilitated a series of support meetings for Ukrainian instructors to exchange experiences in organizing internships and hosting students.

Unlike the pandemic situation with the beginning of the full-scale war, social work organizations have shown *an increased demand for student participation in delivering social services* under the guidance of organization supervisors. This demand is particularly noticeable in communities hosting internally displaced

persons, where a shortage of skilled professionals is evident. Additionally, the period of war witnessed a significant expansion of social work technologies that were applied in practical settings. As a result, there is a growing need for closer collaboration between educational institutions and practical organizations to personalize and systematically organize the knowledge and innovative practices acquired.

As reported by informants, most educational institutions have reevaluated the importance of practice education, and there are discussions about *increasing the number of practical hours,* implementing innovative practice-oriented courses, and involving practicing professionals in teaching, among other measures.

The analysis of practice journals and responses from informants also revealed that *students were actively involved in volunteer activities from the beginning*:

> *The student volunteer activity during the COVID-19 pandemic was initiated by educational institutions or in response to practice placement requests. In the context of the full-scale war, 80% of students started volunteering, and later secured employment in volunteer organizations.*

Teachers also actively participated in volunteer activities and provided supervision for student volunteer work. The interviews also indicate that students themselves initiated projects to assist specific target groups. These activities include fundraising campaigns to raise funds for internally displaced persons or those freed from occupation, conducting recreational and creative activities for children and adolescents and so on. Some students even received awards from the Armed Forces of Ukraine for their initiatives.

The results of the interviews with teachers are also confirmed by online survey with students ($N = 60$), including junior bachelor's, bachelor's, and master's students. It evidenced *students' interest in undertaking internships* and their involvement in volunteer activities.

Regarding the internship form, at the moment of the survey, 41.7% reported volunteering, 40.3% mentioned employment in social work organizations, 9.7% indicated internships at the university, and 8.3% said about engaging in training.

Students mention that they could not stand aside during important social transformations. Independently or with the support of educational institutions, they engaged in the activities of social work organizations as volunteers or had employment opportunities. Often, students themselves initiated or developed social projects aimed at addressing current social issues.

The students acknowledge a change in societal perspectives on the social work profession, which has also influenced their professional self-identification. They have recognized the opportunity to participate in addressing the country's pressing social problems through the tools of professional practice.

However, students have also faced challenges, including a lack of specialized knowledge, especially in dealing with trauma and loss, as well as a lack of professional practice. Personally, they have experienced professional overload, physical exhaustion, frustration, and a lack of resources to address the actual needs and meet the demands of the target groups.

Overall, the survey results provide insights into the students' preferences and experiences regarding internships and practical activities in various fields of social work.

8.6 Discussion and Conclusions

The research results demonstrate that the experiences gained during the COVID-19 pandemic played a pivotal role in adapting to a full-scale war. Insights gathered from interviews with educators suggest that COVID-19 significantly improved the readiness for online education, fostering greater flexibility and adaptability. In 2022, limitations stemming from the shift to online practice education during lockdown were addressed where feasible. Community initiatives and volunteering became integral components of social work practice education. The curriculum's focus on practice education now constitutes only a fraction of the broader volunteer work undertaken by students, with volunteer activities being recognized as formal practice education.

Nonetheless, the full-scale invasion has introduced new challenges, particularly related to persistent stress and uncertainty, safety concerns, and more. The term "social front" has even emerged, highlighting the importance, complexity, and comprehensiveness of the professional roles of social work specialists and their significance in times of war.

Based on insights gathered from students, it is imperative to consider various avenues of support when undertaking professional activities during crises, whether natural or human-made. These encompass three key dimensions: (1) psychological support (mentoring and empowerment), (2) educational support (assessment tools and case management for different client categories, specialized training), and (3) organizational support (community involvement, proper resource management, and effective coordination of work). By addressing these issues, professionals could be better equipped to navigate the complex landscape of crisis conditions, ensuring the well-being of both themselves and the individuals they serve.

The undertaken research confirms that to ensure the lasting core of social work practice education, it is essential to uphold the key social work values while implementing strategies that sustain meaningful client engagement and support to promote the resilience and adaptability of practice educators and students. Additionally, crisis situations demand curriculum adjustments to address trauma, crisis response, and skill development, including digital literacy. Emphasizing advocacy, social justice, and innovative social work interventions for new client groups can enhance the focus of practice education.

The study of Ukraine's experience offers lessons and enables the formulation of *recommendations* for the national and international academic community regarding crisis preparedness in social work practice education:

- *Technology integration and online education*: Ukraine's rapid shift to online education offers insights into integrating technology effectively. Lessons learned can inform the development of innovative online teaching methods, virtual field placements, and digital platforms for student engagement and collaboration during crises.
- *Collaboration and partnerships:* Ukraine's experience emphasizes the importance of collaboration and partnerships between educational institutions, social work organizations, and international stakeholders during crises. Learning from Ukraine's approaches can help establish and maintain partnerships, facilitate remote internships, and leverage collaborations to enhance students' learning experiences and address social issues.
- *Student-centered support and well-being*: Prioritizing student well-being and providing adequate support systems during crises is crucial. Lessons from Ukraine can inform student-centered approaches, such as mentorship programs, counseling services, and resilience-building initiatives, to ensure students' emotional and psychological well-being in times of crisis.
- *Educational practices in working with trauma:* The experience of individuals exposed to constant trauma requires competencies to respond to emerging emotional reactions and provide initial aid to reduce the level of population traumatization. Social workers need specialized self-help and assistance skills, which can be provided through mandatory training courses in their education.
- *Promoting student participation and initiative*: The active initiation by students of various forms and methods of involvement in the war effort and their independent reorientation towards "live" practice, free from bureaucratic contractual procedures and approvals, indicates a unique path in the development of students' professional self-identification in the field of social work. The lesson university practitioners should learn is the need to support participation in practices that students themselves define, taking into account their own needs, professional interests, and values.

All in all, the pandemic and war context in Ukraine have posed significant challenges for social work practice education, highlighting the importance of both continuity and innovation in the field. Our findings, along with studies conducted in other countries (Au et al., 2023; Yehudai et al., 2023), support the notion that despite these challenges, it is crucial to maintain continuity in practice education by prioritizing hands-on experience, field placements, and internships to develop students' necessary skills and competencies.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its *limitations*. The study's small sample size raises questions about generalizing the findings to the broader context. The reliance on interviews and surveys introduces self-reporting and memory biases. Additionally, a lack of longitudinal data hinders understanding the long-term effects and sustainability of innovations. Future research should address these limitations and explore the student perspective more comprehensively to inform improvements in social work practice education.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and full-scale war, Ukraine faced challenges in organizing field internships within its social work practice education system. These challenges included a shortage of qualified social workers for supervision and discrepancies between institutional activities and professional expectations. The limited emphasis on field education in social work programs raised concerns about students' readiness for real-world practice.

However, in the face of these emergencies, Ukraine's social work practice education demonstrated resilience and adaptability. Despite the obstacles, students showcased a remarkable dedication to internships and volunteer activities, illustrating their motivation to address urgent social issues and contribute to community recovery. These findings underscore the significance of student-centered approaches, expanded practical training, and innovative practice-oriented courses, which have the potential to empower students and equip them with the essential competencies needed to effectively tackle acute social problems and drive meaningful change in the field of social work.

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Chapter 9
Social Work Practice Education in Italy During the Pandemic and Beyond: The Context, Experimentations and Their Possible Long-Lasting Values

Giovanni Cellini and Riccardo Guidi

9.1 Introduction

With the outbreak of COVID-19, social work practice education in Italy experienced massive changes. Beyond the clear negative consequences on students, field supervisors and teachers, the shift from in-presence to remote activities also gave the schools of social work some innovation opportunities. After the pandemic, an open question concerns the current value of innovations in 2020–2022.

To address these questions, this chapter analyzes the changes in social work practice education in 25 Italian BA-level programs between 2020 and 2022, illustrates the characteristics of the most innovative experimentations, and reflects on their post-pandemic value. The first section of the chapter presents the crucial characteristics of social work practice education in Italy from a historical perspective, assuming that history matters for innovation. The second briefly recalls the harshness of COVID-19 in Italy and focuses on the changes and experimentations in practice education programs. Finally, we discuss the current relevance of the experimentations and the long-lasting problems of social work practice education in Italy.

The article originates from a strong and ongoing collaboration between the authors. However, as some assessment processes require formal attribution, we would like to specify that Riccardo Guidi is responsible for Sects. 9.1, 9.3, and 9.4, and Giovanni Cellini for Sect. 9.2. Section 9.5 is co-authored.

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9.2 The Historical Path of Social Work Practice Education in Italy

A well-known strand of literature in political science and sociology (Mahoney, 2000) has shown that history matters for institutional change. According to these authors, changes should be considered *path-dependent*, namely dependent on long-term institutional characteristics. Coherently with this approach, recalling the crucial traits of social work practice education in Italy from a historical perspective helps to present the context of the practice education's experimentations during the pandemic and discuss their possible long-lasting value.

Before the first Italian government's acknowledgment of the social work profession (1987), social work education was provided by a system of predominantly private schools, which—despite lacking an official standing—were able to develop and implement highly innovative teaching methods based on interdisciplinarity, student activation, and above all a blend of academic and experiential learning that was to become a feature of program design worldwide (Fargion, 2009, 272). Practice education was an essential part of these schools' approach.

Since the 1990s, the scenario has significantly changed, and meanwhile, social work education is provided—almost exclusively—by public universities that provide a three-year first-cycle degree and a two-year second-cycle. At the end of each, students are entitled to take the exam to be listed in the Generalist (BA-level) and Specialist (MA-level) Social Workers' Professional Register.[1]

Universities' involvement in social work education has had clear, strong points over time (Facchini & Tonon Giraldo, 2010, 32), as well as weaknesses. Since the Italian university system regards social work as a sub-discipline of general sociology, there are no social work departments. For many years, university social work programs in Italy were marked by distrust—if not disdain—for the knowledge underlying the skills of application that Schön (1983) describes as "an ambiguous, secondary kind of knowledge" (28). Practice education still seems to be one of the aspects that most strongly struggled to assert its legitimacy.

Since the 2000s, each Italian university has set up its own organization for social work practice education (Campanini et al., 2022). Overall, in BA-level programs, social work practice education mainly has an observational-conceptual approach in the second year, while students start to experience it first-hand and autonomously during the third year.

In Italy, like elsewhere, one of the most important goals of internships is to instill an openness to reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983; Sicora, 2019). Shuttling between theory and practice is essential in social work (Payne, 2014). It is an ability that must be developed at the outset of basic training and maintained throughout life to avoid drifting into professional stasis. Integrating theoretical knowledge and the

[1] The social work profession in Italy is regulated by a law dating to 1993; to practice in the profession, it is necessary to sit the national qualifying examination—open to degree holders only—and be listed in the register.

reality of practice is not something that students can achieve on their own; rather, it must be promoted and overseen by the university. To access and visualize these connections, students must not only learn to find them but also drill down into what they mean through reflexivity and an openness to new information that can only be gained through organized mentoring and teachers' involvement in reviewing the placement experience (Dellavalle, 2011).

In Italian universities, the dual mentoring approach taken in the social work practice education programs applies a variety of methods (Campanini et al., 2022):

- Supporting and monitoring each student's progress to ensure to the greatest possible extent that the work completed during the placement is consistent with its intended learning outcomes, and prompt action can be taken if problems arise in the relationship with the supervisor or if the student is involved in activities that serve no educational purpose.
- Guiding students in reviewing their placement experience in group workshops focusing on the methodological, ethical, relational, and emotional lessons learned during fieldwork and helping students to see the links between their experience and the interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom.

9.3 Social Work Practice Education's Old and New Problems

The dual mentoring approach to social work practice education requires a close relationship between social service organizations, schools and the professional community. In Italy and elsewhere, the success of neomanagerialism has contributed to making this relationship challenging and increasingly problematic in the last 15 years (Bertotti, 2016). Host organizations have appeared to be significantly reluctant to accept students or allow supervisors to reduce their workload (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). The attention devoted by field supervisors to the students has seemed to be limited (Crisp & Hosken, 2016).

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, social work practice education was already in crisis worldwide (Sewell et al., 2023: 2). In Italy, the problems were mainly connected to the historical weakness of social work as a scientific discipline and the limited recognition of professional knowledge within the university system, as well as the difficulties of the partnerships between schools, social service organizations and professional community. A sign of the first weakness seems to be the scarce relevance given by the Italian schools to the practice education's preparation and elaboration activities. According to our survey (see footnote 3), in 2019/2020 one in three social work BA-level programs did not have any of these activities in their study plan. A sign of the second difficulty has been the introduction of limited enrolment degree programs to face the scarcity of practice education opportunities for students (Cellini & Dellavalle, 2022).

During the pandemic, the difficulties of social work practice education were dramatic. On the one hand, finding reliable field placements and guaranteeing high standards without slowing down the students' careers were problematic during the lockdowns and beyond (Sewell et al., 2023). On the other hand, the physical and mental well-being of students as well as educators were at stake (Diaz-Jimenez et al., 2020; Reznik et al., 2022). Multiple strategies were adopted by the schools to cope with this harsh context, and several alternatives to face-to-face placements were found (Sewell et al., 2023).

After the pandemic, an open question concerns how these experimentations can solve the old and new problems of social work practice education. In relation to Italy, we wonder whether the pandemic-related changes may contribute to addressing some of the historical and institutional limitations of social work practice education.

9.4 Social Work Practice Education in Times of the Pandemic in Italy

The COVID-19 virus had a terrible impact on Italy. In February 2020, the northern regions were the epicenter of the virus outbreak in Europe, and since then, almost 26 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 with over 193,000 deaths have been counted (WHO Coronavirus Dashboard, December 2023). As a strategy to reduce the risks, from March to May 2020 a radical lockdown was ordered at the national level. Restrictive measures were reduced in the summer of 2020 but reinforced again since autumn 2021. Significant limitations continued until the final "back to normality" (April 2023).

As in many other areas of the world, social work education in Italy experienced a "tsunami" (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020). In spring 2020, in response to the schools shutting down, almost all Italian universities suddenly converted their in-presence activities to remote ones. Later on, the scenario became highly fragmented. As a result, the real impact of the health emergency on the Italian universities and the students were generally strong but differentiated.

Social work programs largely followed university-level regulations. Although robust evidence is lacking, the switch to in-remote lessons seemed to be relatively comfortable for students and lecturers after the initial disorientation. Nevertheless, the digital gaps between different areas, students' families, lecturers' generations, etc., constituted a serious criticality. Moreover, the limitations of persistent working from home were especially heavy on people living in limited spaces.

Social work practice education (IASSW & IFSW, 2020, 13) was mostly affected by possible educational losses. Providing students with practical skills—which usually requires face-to-face and field activities—was a radical challenge for social work education. However, the Italian social work programs were not passive.

According to our survey results,[2] all of the BA-level social work programs experienced some kind of change during the pandemic, and the most relevant ones were directly connected to the pandemic in 24 out of 25 schools. Only three allowed the students to skip practice education to graduate, while the majority (56%) reduced the hours of practice education programs.

The changes within the social work programs comprised a moderate (80% of the schools) or radical shift (20%) to the online modalities. The ICT was largely employed in a multifaceted range of activities. As Table 9.1 shows, most Italian schools coped with the pandemic by providing BA-level students with multiple activities that substituted or integrated conventional PE for more than one academic year. Some of the most commonly used activities (e.g., 2 and 4) are very likely to require being specifically designed, organized, and provided. For the Italian context, some (e.g., nr. 3, 9, 13) appear to be radical experimentations, and others moderate ones (e.g., 1, 6, 7). Several of the most common activities (e.g., 2, 4, 5) supported students' reflexivity on professional practice.

A special issue of the Italian Journal of Social Work (Dellavalle, 2020) allows us to have more details about some of the most innovative experiences. Some social work programs like Milan Bicocca and Padua proposed that students conduct project works on specific topics under the supervision of their academic staff. The University of Roma Tre created an original "extended learning environment" (Accorinti et al., 2021, 86) for the students. Here, the academic tutors met the students online and supported them in the re-elaboration of short physical internships through conventional and artistic languages. The University of Turin modified the activities and duration of internships. It allowed the students to observe this process of change to show them how social workers cope with unpredicted difficulties. The academic tutors intensified the support for the students' reflectivity through individual interviews and group and writing activities. As a result, the relations between the students and the academic tutors were significantly strengthened, with new learning opportunities for both of them (Fornero et al., 2021). The University of Verona originally filled the gaps in curricular internships through narrative laboratories via Zoom. Here, the students represented and commented on the stories of potential users and the academic tutors facilitated the peer-to-peer learning process (Dalla Chiara, 2021).

The University of Sassari (Casula, 2021) followed two directions. First, it worked to make their in-remote internships in social work organizations highly detailed and tailored to students' and supervisors' profiles and preferences. As a result, the role

[2] The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire administered by *Limesurvey* in April–July 2022 within the context of the SWooPEd project (See Chap. 3). The questionnaire included questions—mainly closed-ended—about the respondents' profile, the structure of social work practice education before the pandemic, practice education's changes during the pandemic, the perceived impacts of the changes, and the likelihood of keeping some experimental activities after the pandemic. Thanks to the collaboration with the Italian Conference of the Schools of Social Work (CLASS), all 37 Italian BA-level programs' presidents were invited and 25 answered (response rate = 68%).

Table 9.1 Percentage of activities carried out by the schools as a substitute for conventional practice education during the pandemic and their likelihood of use afterward

	2019–2020 (%)	2020–2021 (%)	2021–2022 (%)	Likelihood of continuing
1. Various topics were discussed through the online system for the course	80.0	80.0	44.0	3.5
2. Students received written assignments related to a real practice placement	80.0	72.0	52.0	3.6
3. The supervisors of the host organizations worked remotely with the students	72.0	84.0	32.0	N.a.
4. Students received case studies and a written assignment to reflect on the case	72.0	68.0	48.0	4.2
*5. Group work for students: Synchronous (*e.g.*, in breakout rooms)*	68.0	60.0	40.0	3.6
6. Experts in their fields were hosted in the courses to strengthen the field experiences of the students	64.0	76.0	52.0	4.2
7. Provision of students with certain assignments, reports, etc.	60.0	60.0	48.0	3.9
8. Students watched video materials available online (subject-specific films)	52.0	52.0	36.0	3.5
9. Students received video-recorded lessons/materials created by the lecturers	48.0	48.0	36.0	2.7
10. Students continued their internship in social work practice, even during the lockdown	48.0	56.0	56.0	N.a.
11. Group work for students: Asynchronous	40.0	44.0	24.0	3.5
12. Service users interacted with students	44.0	52.0	36.0	3.6
13. Students were required to record themselves while practicing professional skills	24.0	28.0	16.0	2.9
14. Walk and talk (a mobile supervision while keeping a physical distance)	24.0	28.0	12.0	N.a.
15. Students involved in providing online services for specific groups in cooperation with partners	24.0	28.0	16.0	N.a.
16. Students visited specific practice placements	24.0	16.0	32.0	N.a.

(continued)

Table 9.1 (continued)

	2019–2020 (%)	2020–2021 (%)	2021–2022 (%)	Likelihood of continuing
17. Students received case studies and a written assignment to reflect on the case	12.0	8.0	8.0	N.a.

Source: SwooPEd survey (2022)
From 1 = highly unlikely, to 5 = very likely, N.a. = not available

of the supervisors was exalted, and the individual supervision of the students was strengthened. Second, the students could count on unprecedented collective supervision opportunities through the "Experimental Laboratories" that specifically trained them for active listening and professional writing in social work.

Jointly with the regional council of the *assistenti sociali*, the University of Calabria provided the MA students with a four-step-ICT-based internship: (1) an introductive workshop, (2) group work about specific topics of SW practice based on the analysis of literature, institutional sources and case studies, (3) group project work writing and (4) evaluation (Licursi & Marcello, 2021).

A path-breaking experimentation was co-created by the three Tuscan universities (Firenze, Pisa, Siena) and the regional council of the *assistenti sociali*. Unlike in the pre-pandemic scenario, they adopted a multi-scalar strategy. At the regional level, they designed some basic activities for the students with no internship opportunities. Later on, these activities were locally embedded in specific learning processes by each university, according to the specific characteristics of their programs, local contexts and students. More than 300 BA students and 100 Tuscan *assistenti sociali* were involved in the learning processes in 2020/2021. Each in their own way, the three universities provided the students with a five-step path: (1) a preparation and kick-off meeting; (2) practice-based video lessons recorded by the *assistenti sociali*; (3) online collective supervision in small groups on specific social work topics provided by the *assistenti sociali* on a weekly basis; (4) final elaboration; and (5) a discussion of the contents with the academic staff (Guidi et al., 2021).

As Table 9.2 shows, the experimentations carried out by the Italian schools to cope with the pandemic in social work practice education were significantly—although not radically—different from what they were used to prior to the pandemic, with the relationships between students and supervisors, which appear to be the most renewed sphere of social work practice education activities. Data in Table 9.3 illustrate that according to the respondents, the schools successfully dealt with different aspects of the new practice education in 2020–2022. However, the impacts of the changes were considered problematic (Table 9.4). On the one hand, the online social work practice education activities negatively affected students' (and teachers') well-being and some worries concerned their readiness for professional practice. On the other hand, the relationships between the students and schools' field educators were positively reshaped.

Overall, respondents' opinions seem to show that in such a dramatic conjuncture as the pandemic, the schools were able to cope with the possible worst aspects

effectively. Coherently, it is unsurprising that the use of unconventional practice education activities during the pandemic is considered likely to continue by many schools, even after the pandemic (see Table 9.1).

9.5 From the Pandemic to the Future Scenario of Social Work Practice Education in Italy

In Italy—one of the countries most affected by the pandemic—social work has implemented a series of remarkable experimentations to cope with the emergency. This has occurred both in social work practice in general and in social work practice education.

On the one hand, the ICT-based activities carried out by the Italian schools could not have given the students full access to the relational physical environment (clients, professionals, organizations etc.) where social work practice is usually learned. This probably deprived the students of experiencing some crucial aspects of social work practice, such as the management of emotions. The risk of having a generation of social work students (and future social workers) with no clear ideas about what social work practice in context means is thus real. On the other hand, the experimentations allowed the universities to escape from the routine and reconsider practice education beyond the usual paths.

After the pandemic, what remains of the experimentation? How can those experimentations contribute to overcoming the structural limitations of Italian social work practice education? Can we prefigure enduring innovations? Although these questions are demanding and further research seems necessary, possible answers should consider the specificities of social work practice education and social work practice jointly, as well as the interplay of methodological and institutional features.

According to the specific context and the pandemic-related experimentations we have analyzed, there seem to be two crucial devices for continuity in pandemic-related experimentations in Italy. The *first* is related to the partnership nature of

Table 9.2 Comparison of activities before and after the pandemic

How similar/different were the following aspects of practice education activities carried out since the pandemic started compared with the situation before the pandemic? (from 1 = very similar to 5 = very different)	
Interaction between practice supervisors and students	3.7
Content of (online) meetings	3.0
Assignments to students	3.0
Assessment of students	2.8
Possibilities to achieve the competences and skills	3.4
Instructions to practice/field supervisors	3.4
Average	*3.2*

Source: SWooPEd survey (2022)

Table 9.3 Subjective evaluation of changes in practice education

How would you rate the following items in the practice education activities of your school in 2020–2022? (from 1 = extremely negative to 5 = extremely positive)	
Use of online platforms for students, field supervisors and academic staff	3.3
Students' academic performance	3.3
Quality of practice education	3.2
Access to virtual infrastructure for students	4.1
Teachers' adaptation	3.7
Interaction between students and field educators from faculty/school	3.3
School measurements/policy	3.4
Learning content	3.4
Teaching methods	3.4
Evaluation methods	3.2
Average	*3.5*

Source: SwooPEd survey (2022)

Table 9.4 Subjective evaluation of the impact of online activities on different aspects of practice education

How would you rate the overall impact of online practice activities on the following aspects? (from 1 = extremely negative to 5 = extremely positive)	
On students' skills	2.8
On students' readiness for practice	2.7
On-field practice educators	3.0
On the interaction between students and field educators from faculty/school	3.3
Students' well-being	2.4
Teachers' well-being	2.7
Average	*2.8*

Source: SwooPEd survey (2022)

social work practice education and the role of supervisors here. As Marion Bogo so brilliantly showed in her works (Bogo & Vayda, 1998, Sewell et al., 2023), this is probably the key—and most problematic—institutional aspect of social work practice education. In Italy, the need to shape "alternative" internships pushed the academic staff to re-design the learning processes and improve the matching between students and supervisors. In several cases, this has also implied giving the students an unprecedented role of co-producers of the learning outcomes and placing the supervisors at the core of the learning process. The satisfaction of the survey respondents with the relationships with the supervisors seems to confirm that the harsh challenges of practice education during the pandemic gave a potentially new impetus to the collaboration between schools, supervisors and students. Our research confirms that social work practice education experimentations reinforced the relationships between academic and professional actors (Fargion et al., 2020), as well as those between different universities, and between students, supervisors and academic staff at a micro level.

The *second* device is related to the relevance attributed to the non-field activities of social work practice education, namely to those activities aimed at preparing students' fieldwork and supporting their re-elaboration after the fieldwork. Partly due to the national historical path of social work education, these activities are often weak in Italian schools (see above). As our evidence shows, the reduction in the hours spent by the interns in the organizations was generally balanced by the Italian schools through new activities that actively supported the students' reflectivity. This was possible through the mobilization of field supervisors' and academic tutors' know-how.

We would thus advance the hypothesis that beyond the long-lasting use of the ICT in social work practice and education, possible enduring innovations in social work practice education are about (1) the greater centrality of professional knowledge and the increased role of tutors and supervisors in the schools, and (2) the growing relevance of reflectivity in practice education activities.

While identifying a possible long-lasting value of social work practice education experimentations is not difficult per se, the institutional conditions to transform the potentialities into realities seem to be not very favorable.

Innovative ways of action developed during the pandemic allowed for the creation of new learning and experiences in social work education, which can meet the need to be "ready" in case of other future emergencies. The experience accumulated, e.g., in the use of ICT, will certainly be of great help in future crisis scenarios. Due to the pandemic, ICT use has increased— qualitatively—and digital skills in social work have undoubtedly improved. In the future, it is easy to imagine a structural and no longer emergency use of remote communication for several work activities.

The future role of professional knowledge, supervisors and tutors in Italian schools and the future relevance of reflectivity in social work practice education seem to clash with those above historical and institutional problems. The number of students, the availability of staff in both universities and welfare services, and the organizational setups of the various universities are factors that can facilitate or hinder effective learning paths (Neve, 2022). A relevant problem—made more evident during the pandemic but already existing—continues to be the difficulty for some Italian universities in finding sufficient organizations where students can carry out their internships. The imbalance between the number of students and the number of places for traineeships has led to a debate about a limited number in some universities (a minority of the national total), precisely to cope with the shortage of places in the welfare system. Moreover, the current management of practical traineeships is affected by economic factors in some areas of the country that have led to staff shortages in the services and fewer supervisors who can follow students in practical traineeships. On the other hand, there is the problem of the precariousness of the social service teaching staff not yet fully embedded in Italian universities, where there are—due to national regulations—no social work departments that would be needed to provide an autonomous disciplinary sector for social work. In such a scenario, there is the risk of managing practical traineeship as a compulsory

ritual without a consistent training project or relegating it to the margins of the curriculum with the connotation of a simple practice (Ibid.).

In conclusion, we could say that while the Italian community of social work practice education successfully coped with the pandemic through a multiple range of activities, the "back to normality" finally meant returning to conventional in-person fieldwork. Still, it also probably implied the return to pre-pandemic problems and weaknesses of social work practice education in several schools. In contrast, after the pandemic of bottom-up initiatives and creative approaches, new regulations seem necessary to develop social work practice education in Italy. These would help fill the gap remaining in Italian social work education in relation to the Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training (IASSW-IFSW, 2020; Cellini & Dellavalle, 2022; Neve, 2022).

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Chapter 10
The Pandemic as a Starting Point for the Development of Resilience-Based Practice Education: Experiences from the Czech Republic

Monika Punová

10.1 Introduction

The topic of practice education of social work students is the subject of continuous empirical research and, according to some authors (Bogo, 2015; Punová, 2022, 2023a, b), it is even one of the most researched and discussed parts of the curriculum. The unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed educators in a new role and opened new horizons for them. It posed a significant challenge to students and educators alike and ultimately accelerated a number of innovative changes. This chapter focuses on how the pandemic has affected social work practice education in the Czech Republic (CR). Firstly, the social status and institutionalization of the social work profession in the Czech Republic are presented, which influence the process of education, including practice education. Then, the status of social work practice education during the pandemic measures is described. Some of the main results of the SWooPEd project (2022) questionnaire survey conducted in 15 European countries (see also Chap. 3) are also presented. For the Czech-Republic, the questionnaire was completed by instructors from eight higher education institutions or universities. These instructors were specifically involved in the education of the bachelor's degree program in social work. The chapter not only focuses on the past, but mainly explores the implications for the design of future social work practice education curricula. Therefore, its main aim is to reflect on the following questions: What lessons can be drawn from the development of practice education during the pandemic in the Czech Republic? What are the implications for promoting student resilience in practice education? While the first question is

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focused on the Czech context, the second question has an international overlap, as the author, in agreement with other authors (Evans et al., 2021; Breda, 2022; Nissen, 2020), believes that the pandemic poses a key challenge to social workers and educators, and that is precisely the greater emphasis on the topic of resilience.

Why is it important to focus on resilience? Because resilience is relevant wherever one experiences significant difficulties in achieving the desired state of well-being. The unprecedented pandemic has certainly placed a significant strain on some students' well-being and how to manage life in the entire system of social work practice education (educators, social service providers and their clients). As shown in a study by the American Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) on the impact of the pandemic on the well-being of social work students, a total of 81% (n = 3564) reported that their mental health had deteriorated due to the pandemic (Kurgiankis & Lee, 2020). In a survey by Evans et al. (2021) with 3291 social work students in the USA, 35% of students reported a deterioration in mental health as a result of the pandemic. In relation to the lower levels of psychological disruption in this second research, it is important to note that this research also looked further at disruption in other areas—academic achievement and financial security. In fact, the pandemic has become a touchstone of student resilience, and not everyone has been able to stand the test. Some struggled to cope with online learning. Practice in organizations became more difficult. Some had to change their place of practice or take up work commitments; suffered from loneliness due to isolation from classmates, friends, and family; worried about their health and the health of their loved ones; and may have felt that they were living in a makeshift that was robbing them of time. Some also had to cope with the death of loved ones. The situation was not improved by the uncertainty of future developments and their pain became prolonged and therefore more stressful. On the other hand, many students were looking for ways to cope with the situation and move on. They began to use education more through the online space in which there was a boom of educational opportunities. They appreciated that they could live with their loved ones (mostly their family), they did not have to pay the costs associated with their studies and suddenly they had more time. Some discovered the depth of volunteering and became active in their community. A specific phenomenon in the Czech Republic was the massive sewing of drapes, in which students were also involved.

In these examples, we see that one stimulus—in this case, a pandemic—can cause very different reactions and how important it is to be able to find suitable coping strategies. One of the fundamental lessons that the pandemic taught us is that we need to emphasize students' well-being and look for conditions that make them more robust, prepare them to find their balance and enable them to navigate their life in challenging conditions—which would mean strengthening their resilience.

In this context, it was rather a shortcoming and misperception that university educators were only responsible for students' academic lives. Regarding students as whole personalities and facing the experiences of the pandemic, we can no longer strictly separate the students' personal and academic lives; their well-being is always connected to the integration of both perspectives. Hence, this chapter tries to bridge these dimensions and takes building resilience through practice education as

its main focus. The author also draws on her own empirical and practical experience. She has been supervising social workers and social work students for 20 years and coordinating social work practice education at the university for 10 years.

10.2 Social Work Education in the Czech Republic

Current social work in the Czech Republic faces many difficulties, which is also reflected in its education. Although it has a long history spanning over 100 years, its status in society is still unclear (Matulayová et al., 2021; Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2022; Navrátilová & Navrátil, 2021; Punová, 2022, 2023b; Špiláčková et al., 2022). The process of institutionalization was interrupted in the 1950s with the rise of the Communist Party, when social work training was abolished under Soviet domination. The Communist Party declared the activities of social workers useless because, supposedly, there were no social problems in socialist society that it could not solve itself. In fact, there was even an increase in social problems in society. A new establishment of social work began after 1989, when the totalitarian regime collapsed (Matulayová & Musil, 2013). There was a resurgence of social work education and its development in the public and civil sectors. However, its enactment did not occur until 2006. The Social Services Act No. 206 established that social work is a regulated profession and further outlines who can perform the role of a social worker as well as what training is required to do so. Although we see some positive developments here, its social status remains unclear. This is despite the fact that social workers operate across the institutional structure and work in all sectors. As Baláž (2017) points out, social workers hardly associate and their professional organizations have marginal influence. Education in social work takes place within higher education in dozens of accredited bachelors' and masters' programs; postgraduate social work studies are only available at Masaryk University in Brno and the University of Ostrava.

During the 30-year evolution of education in universities, many changes have taken place, and this also applies to social work practice education. In the early 1990s, there was a debate about whether practice education belonged in university education at all, but later its role was emphasized and questions about its integration into teaching, including how to organize it, began to be addressed. Currently, the role of practice education in the professionalization of social work in the context of postmodern times is being reflected upon (Navrátil & Navrátilová, 2022; Punová & Navrátilová, 2014). Since 1993, education at universities and higher vocational schools has been guided by the Association of Social Work Educators in the Czech Republic, which has also defined the Minimum Standards for Social Work Education. These standards also regulate the practice units and the supervision of students and stipulate that practice education must make up at least one-quarter of the total scope of education. According to data from the SWooPEd survey (2022), students in the Czech Republic spent during the academic year 2019–2020 before the pandemic started an average of 553 h in practice in organizations, while the

average in all the participating countries was 502 h (note that this is direct practice in organizations—the data does not include the number of hours of accompanying supervision).

In our case, practice education takes place within the student-organization-school triad. In some cases, professional practice is preceded by field trips, during which students learn about the practical functioning of organizations providing social services. Subsequent professional practice is carried out in the chosen organizations, during which they strive to achieve the set objectives. These organizations are part of the public/municipal administrations and non-profit organizations. In each organization, the student is accompanied by a designated instructor (mentor) who is involved in cooperation with both the student and the school. The professional practice is supervised in parallel. Supervisions take place in the school under the guidance of a qualified supervisor (who must have completed, among other things, a minimum of 150 h of supervision training). Supervisions take both individual and group forms and aim to reflect on what is happening in the practice as well as on self-reflection for personal and professional growth. The main coordinator of social work practice education is the school, which has a certain degree of autonomy in complying with the National Minimum Standards.

The content of practical education in social work often oscillates between a competence-based and a reflective approach. Higher vocational schools, in particular, emphasize the acquisition of competences, but the competence model can also be found in universities. However, the need for a reflective approach is particularly evident in the university environment (Navrátil et al., 2021). As Navrátil and Navrátilová (2022) point out, a purely competence-oriented model seems to be rather inappropriate in the context of social worker identity building in the current postmodern era as it does not take into account the influence of the social context or setting, ignores the possibilities of professional judgment and does not sufficiently reflect group processes. Beyond this, the mere development of competences within training does not allow students to reflect on the new challenges and social changes that staff and clients face in postmodern conditions.

10.3 Practice Education During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Czech Republic

The first case of COVID-19 was detected in March 2020 and triggered a series of government measures that changed very frequently as the pandemic evolved. Thus, the government gradually declared states of emergency, restricted the movement of people through lockdowns, closed borders, and mandated distance education. The impact of these often chaotic and unpredictable measures was severe for both the students and the organizations that provided internships for students.

The first state of emergency was declared on 12 March 2020. The previous day, universities were closed, and distance learning classes were closed (see below).

Subsequently, as of 17 March 2020, the activities of social service organizations were suspended under the state of emergency. This suspension meant that students had nowhere to practice. The staff of the organizations were uncertain due to the unpredictable situation and were looking for ways to provide services to their clients, and accompanying students was often beyond their means. Some organizations had to terminate their cooperation with the students, who then dealt with the situation promptly in cooperation with the coordinators at the school. The organizations partially resumed their activities at the end of April 2020; however, only basic services could be provided to the clients, which was done in a non-contact electronic way. As many clients did not have access to a computer or the internet or had limited telephone access, direct contact with them was very complicated. At the time, staff were addressing how to provide services to these types of clients. Some of them interpreted the regulations rather broadly or, in some cases, even knowingly violated government regulations and visited clients in their home environment because of the inability to have long-distance contact. They also involved students in this activity as part of their practicum. The practice thus took on an innovative and, sometimes, even subversive form.

The organizations operated for more than 2 months in such a setting, after which they were allowed to operate in an outpatient form, although with a number of limitations (the outreach form was still recommended, the number of people who could be present in the organization was limited, work teams and groups of clients had to rotate to limit their contact, all workers and clients and students had to undergo antigen testing). After the previous interruptions, field placements for students could recommence, although some organizations are adopting "wait and see" tactics in relation to placements. Within the internships, students began to meet more frequently with the organization's clients in outdoor spaces.

Not until June 2020 were social work service organizations fully restored. However, since October 2020, due to a newly declared state of emergency, access to services has been restricted again. Based on previous experiences, the staff of the organizations were already better prepared for the situation and able to provide placements to the students. On 12 October, the government made it compulsory for university students studying full-time in social work, medicine and education to work. This duty was imposed by the work orders of the governors of the various regions, but students who had health and family reasons were exempted. At the same time, deliberate avoidance of this obligation could be punished by a fine of 50,000 Czech Crowns. According to Truhlářová et al. (2021), the government shifted its responsibility to students through this work obligation instead of addressing it in other ways. As the authors highlight, unlike the government, the students demonstrated their ability and were up to the task. The issue of work obligation was also addressed in the research by Špiláčková et al. (2022), who examined the attitudes of 33 social work students at the Faculty of Social Studies in Ostrava. Most of the students worked with the elderly, three worked with families at risk, and one worked with homeless people. Students reported that the motivation for the work duty was the fear of being fined for disobeying a work order, while others appreciated that the work duty was recognized as a practice or perceived it as their own

need to be in solidarity. Some students also reported that through this duty, they could test their professional readiness by testing their potential and limits.

Government measures were repealed in April 2022. As of 10 July 2023, 4,642,803 infections and 42,811 deaths have been recorded in the Czech Republic, which has a population of 10.5 million (Ministry of Health Czech Republic, 2023). Overall, PE has undergone significant changes during the pandemic period. Organizations, as well as their clients, faced uncertainty, unpredictability, and incomprehensibility of government regulations, and this uncertainty was often passed on to students. Therefore, they either terminated student placements because they could not provide them with a fully-fledged internship, they provided them with an alternative means of completing the internship (e.g., providing them with access to online meetings, webinars, and conferences), or they gave them tasks that could be completed from home (studying various materials, conceptualizing programs for clients, compiling partial statistics for the organization).

There were also impacts on schools and the provision of supervision. These moved from face-to-face to online and were implemented with greater frequency. Schools were coordinators of the implementation of practice despite the difficult pandemic conditions. In a number of schools, supervisors volunteered to provide online supervision free of charge for students who were not currently undertaking a compulsory placement but were undertaking real social work as part of their employment (this was the case for the combined form of study). During supervision, there was a greater emphasis on linking academic studies with personal life. At some schools, teacher-supervisors directly coordinated with instructors at internship organizations, assisting them in arranging these practical experiences. The pandemic period also presented significant challenges for educators. Table 10.1 shows what social work practice education looked like in each year during the pandemic. The numeric values in the table represent the number of schools that have included the activities in their practical education curriculum.

Table 10.1 indicates that nearly all institutions providing internships to students in schools involved in the mentioned research allowed students to undertake internships even during the pandemic. At the same time, it is evident that most schools transitioned to remote learning during the first two periods of the pandemic. It also showed that in the last period, when the pandemic was already receding, practice education was returning to its pre-pandemic state. As part of the research, school representatives also commented on other innovative approaches they had implemented during the pandemic. An example of an innovative approach was a newly established project in which students from the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno collaborated with the non-profit organization Helping Hands. As part of this project, students contributed to providing social services to people experiencing homelessness. Specifically, they assisted in running a low-threshold facility, conducted COVID testing, provided food assistance, and offered social counseling. Educators also reported that student volunteering was included as part of internships, which was carried out to a larger extent due to the pandemic. Students went to families at risk, brought medicines and shopping to the elderly and needy,

Table 10.1 Activities replacing regular practical education during a pandemic in the Czech Republic

Activity	2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022
Students continued practice education during the lockdown	7	8	6
Transition of practice education to the online space	7	6	2
Students visited specific places of practice	6	6	3
Service users were in contact with students	5	5	3
Students received video recordings or materials from the teachers	4	4	2
Students were provided with reports	4	4	2
Synchronous online student group meetings	4	4	2
Students were given case studies and asked to reflect on them	4	4	1
Placement organizations instructors worked with students at a distance	4	3	2
Students watched video materials available online (e.g., films with social themes)	4	3	1
Students received written documents related to the placement	3	3	1
Asynchronous online student group meetings	3	3	1
Experts from practice were involved in teaching	3	3	1
Walk and talk (supervision provided by mobile phone or on a walk-in basis)	3	3	1
Students participated in online service delivery in collaboration with staff	1	1	1
Students recorded themselves as part of skills training	1	1	0
Social coffee (informal virtual meeting over a cup of coffee or tea)	0	0	0

Source: SWooPEd survey (2022)

made and distributed drapes, or helped with childcare for the children of health workers who were much more likely to be at work.

The SWooPEd (2022) survey also focused on the impact of online learning on different aspects of practice education from the perspective of educators. On a Likert scale of 1 (most negative) to 5 (most positive), they reported that the most negative impact was on the well-being of students (2.5) and lecturers (2.5). In other words, this situation was very challenging for both groups. Furthermore, educators felt that practice education in the online setting prepared students for real-world practice at an average level (3). Interestingly, school representatives felt that online practice education had a more positive impact on the instructors from the placement organizations (3.5) and the communication between the student-educator-instructor triad from the organization (3.5).

10.4 Resilience-Based Practice Education

Let us ask again the question mentioned in the introduction. What lessons can be drawn from the evolution of practice education during the pandemic in the Czech Republic? First and foremost, it became clear that there is a need to focus on students' well-being, as their academic coping is closely linked to their coping in their personal lives. This nurturing of well-being is possible through promoting its resilience. We will define resilience as follows (cf. Punova, 2023a):

> Resilience is a concept that describes a multilevel dynamic process of positive development and achievement of a student's desired well-being despite experiencing difficulties in managing his/her student role. It consists of successful interactions with the environment about resources to achieve the desired well-being in the face of potential or actual adversity. Applying resilience also involves recovery and learning lessons for the future. Strengthening resilience is appropriate when interactions between subjects and their environment imply a risk of adversity or when adversities are currently present.

The pandemic posed a real risk of disruption to students' well-being. In its context, students' resilience was demonstrated by their ability to adapt to changes in their practice-based learning (e.g., if the organization refused to continue to provide them with a practice placement, they found another one, became involved in entirely new activities within the practice organization, became volunteers, or asked a supervisor in the school for help). At the same time, they were able to cope with difficulties in their personal life (e.g., fear for the health of family members, loss of previous security, loss of personal contact, etc.).

Bedoe and Adamson (in Taylor et al., 2006) view student resilience more narrowly as a process of developing the skills needed to cope with stress in the workplace of practice and also to develop reflexivity through which the student can develop a professional identity. We should add that all of this occurs within the context of interactions between different system levels (organizational, community, and government policy levels) and that, ultimately, organizational resilience is always connected to the possibilities and limitations of their members. The pandemic, in particular, has shown that students' practices are also related to societal aspects (e.g., government actions in response to COVID).

It would be possible to characterize resilience at length. Here we focus on some key aspects that have emerged in practice education during the pandemic. Generally speaking, resilience derives from the interactions between risk and protective factors. Therefore, we need to reflect on these, looking at what benefits students as protective factors and what, on the other hand, threatens their well-being as risk

factors. Beyond the items that could already have been mentioned in this chapter, the research by Špiláčková et al. (2022) examined the factors that helped students cope with work obligations in the context of the pandemic. Students appreciated that they were able to gain new experiences, knowledge and skills and were able to help clients in difficult situations related to the pandemic. Some students also mentioned it as positive that they received a financial reward for the work experience as part of their work duty. Another interesting finding was that students were gradually able to strike a balance between negative experiences and positive impacts, reporting that although it was challenging, it contributed to something good. Among the challenging situations, they listed the unpleasant atmosphere in the workplace and the sometimes hostile attitude of some staff towards students. The students attributed this to work pressure on staff during the pandemic and also to the fact that staff were often unclear about the role of students or deliberately exploited them. In such cases, students performed activities that were not related to social work, mostly nursing. It is not surprising then that when students were asked to indicate what they would recommend to organizations for any future similar situations, the main recommendation was that they should offer students activities that are realistically related to the nature of social work and that they should better organize placement units for them so that they can better combine their practice with other lectures and study activities. The last appeal was about communication; students expect clear and systematic information on the conditions, tasks and aims of their interventions.

In what ways did practice education support students' resilience? First and foremost, it reflects the importance of connecting personal and academic lives and considering their well-being. It became evident that educators, instructors in practice organizations and students were able to exercise a considerable degree of flexibility in the face of the unprecedented burdens of the pandemic. The pandemic became an accelerator for new teaching methods; students were able to learn new skills, and new actors (e.g., experts from practice) and new teaching methods became involved in practice education (see Table 10.1). Beyond this, the collaboration between students and service users in practice education was also innovated. The pandemic has shown that effective communication and cooperation between multiple stakeholders from different backgrounds is needed to strengthen students' resilience. Furthermore, the importance of seeking meaningfulness in practice and within social work as a profession also became apparent. One of the fundamental principles of fostering resilience that became evident in the courses for practice education is the graduating positive effect of experience. As the experience of coping with the pandemic grew, individual subjects gained readiness and strategies for coping with hardship. Pandemics often occur in waves (here the surges of disease cases), and the experience of the first wave (which may have been a shock to many) was an advantage for the coping of the subsequent waves (cf. Cheung, 2022; Punova, 2023a). During the pandemic, students were largely exposed to the harsh realities of practice, dealing with unexpected crises

and leaving their often idealized perceptions behind. In the following paragraph, I have summarized these principles for illustration:

Principles of resilience-based practice education:
Reflect on student well-being, as academic coping is related to coping in personal life.
Build resilience in the face of real and potential adversity.
Focus on access to and support for resources, potentials, and opportunities in all settings that impact practice education.
Develop students' reflexive thinking, as this also helps to discover adversity as a natural part of professional growth and performance.
Highlight the importance of reflection on the meaningfulness of practice education and social work itself.
Focus on the positive impact of passing previous examinations in developing reflective thinking.
Focus on coping skills, stress management and skills related to the online space as part of the development of students' skills.
Develop new approaches and methods of working with students and do not be afraid of innovation.
Involve both the instructors in the organization and the service users in new types of collaboration.

10.5 Conclusion

It has been said that one experience is better than a thousand words. In this sense, despite its enormous difficulty, the pandemic was a very valuable experience. In the field of practice education, it marked a turning point towards what may have been overlooked until now: the person of the student, the meaning of practice education and the profession of social work. This new focus could even transform the whole educational curriculum. The pandemic has exposed a vulnerability in students that cannot be ignored. It has also shown the plight of educators and representatives of practice organizations. In the same way, it would be a mistake to think that the most important thing the pandemic has taught us is the importance of developing online learning in practice education. The most important message is the focus on the importance of the theme of resilience within practice education, of seeking opportunities for positive development in the face of adversity. It turns the attention of educators toward the hope that human frailty is accompanied by the immeasurable power of human potential and environmental resources. It points to the hope of positive development even when it seems to be out of sight.

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Chapter 11
Bridging Digitalization and Digitality in Social Work Practice Education: A Post-pandemic View Through the Kaleidoscope from Germany

Adrian Roeske and Michelle Mittmann

11.1 Ad-hoc Digitalization and Resistance: Practices and Framings Emerging from the Pandemic

This chapter aims to discuss the tension between digitalization and "doing digitality" in social work study programs and social work practice education during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the acute phase[1] of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring and summer of 2020, manifold fears and anxieties spread at colleges and universities, often contributing to a broader feeling of powerlessness. The fear of infection and serious illness went hand in hand with financial worries, as students lost their part-time jobs due to the contact restrictions and initially missed state-funded monetary compensation (Bäumker, 2021). Many educators were forced to "take the plunge" into the unknown and establish digital formats for teaching (Radeiski & Mittmann, 2020), even with little experience and the mere assumption of the usefulness of the applied methods.

For German-speaking countries, resistance during this phase was expressed by the petition "Nichtsemester" ("non-semester"). Here, three professors spoke out

[1] The Denzler and Schuler (2018) crisis model was used to understand crisis processes.

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against testing and crediting students during the summer semester 2020 and demanded that the standard duration of a study program should be prolonged for the length of the pandemic. They also pleaded for relief to the obligatory implementation of online teaching formats: "The summer semester should therefore take place with clearly changed teaching formats and under suspension of strict teaching obligations" (Villa Braslawski et al., 2020). An essential component of the call was the resistance to the ad-hoc digitalization of teaching settings. The open letter, signed by 1380 lecturers from German universities—among them numerous social work lecturers—states that "face-to-face teaching cannot be transferred to the internet instantaneously"[2] (ibid.).

Social work students were equally unsettled by the rush to digitalization. In particular, the digital learning environments caused feelings of bias. Ottje Bunjes, a master's student in social work, commented:

> This breaking away from analog teaching-learning routines due to the Corona pandemic evokes resistance to changes in this regard and leads to insecurities. These were particularly felt in the digital seminar and teaching spaces. How do I shape such a space with my presence? When do I speak, who speaks at all, how do I 'announce' myself, how much do I say, what are fellow students doing, why did some deactivate the camera, did I just pick my nose thoughtlessly and in *fullscreen*? (Bunjes, 2020)

Students who wanted to start their social work internship in 2020[3] were even more challenged by the changed conditions of social work practice education in addition to the new digital study routines. Jasmin Bäumker (2021), then a bachelor's student in social work, described her experiences and observations in a critical report. As an intern at a women's shelter, she was able to start her internship as planned and thus attain one of the prerequisites for state recognition as a social worker. Looking at her fellow students, she described scenarios that clearly show the scope of the challenges:

> The planned weekly internship day was rejected by many workplaces. It was unclear how the internships would develop. Some students already received refusals for their planned internship at this point. Accordingly, continuation of studies was not possible as planned. (Ibid., 12f.)

However, most students were able to start their internship as planned (ibid., 13)—as far as this can be understood in retrospect against the background of limited empirical evidence. Missed practice times could be compensated by starting the internship earlier or prolonging the internship phase after consultation with the internship sites. Teaching, learning, and practice education continued; however, students often did not perceive them as satisfactory. Students requested more participation in negotiation processes on framework conditions, a recognition for their contributions to

[2] This and all subsequent quotations have been translated from German into English by the authors.

[3] The implementation and necessity of internships are regulated differently in Germany depending on the federal states. In some cases, an internship during studies is sufficient, while others must complete a one-year practical phase after the end of their studies: https://www.hs-emden-leer.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fbsag/stg/Soziale_Arbeit__BA_/Berufspraktikanten/Regelungen_der_Bundeslaender_zum_Anerkennungsjahr_von_SozialarbeiterInne....pdf

the pandemic management in practice, and a recognition of the conditions made more difficult by the digital format of internship supervision, among other demands (Bäumker et al., 2020, cited in Bäumker, 2021, 15).

11.2 Digitality During the Pandemic: Metaphorically Understood and Described

During the pandemic, metaphors were often used to understand and interpret ambiguous and complex situations. Metaphors serve to "draw attention to affects and intuitive experiences" (Schmitt, 2017a, b, 8), but they often also underestimate the perceived complexity. They help to go "from 'apprehension' to 'concept'" (ibid.). In the context of the pandemic, three metaphors were used rather frequently. The first to mention is the *burning glass effect* of the pandemic, which describes how structural challenges only became visible when the pandemic occurred, despite having accumulated over a long time prior (Holznagel, 2021; Werkmann & Wolfs, 2021). Within the field of social work, the pandemic situation acted like a burning glass and highlighted existing problems (Meyer, 2020). Spiegler et al. stated, "[…] the pandemic sheds light on threatening fragilities" (Spiegler et al., 2022, 219) that were already existent and visible before the pandemic. Similarly, when it comes to the degree of digitalization in social work, discussions about the lack of competencies and furnishing had occurred before the pandemic hit. Therefore, before giving recommendations for digitally supported internship guidance, the fragilities visible under the burning glass must be considered and analyzed.

The second metaphor is the *kaleidoscope*, which was used to refer to the different facets and challenges that emerge out from complex situations, such as the emerging digital age (Streck, et al. 2022, 16), as well as highlight different aspects of the same topic. An example of this would be the impact of the pandemic on the economy, education, climate, etc. (BEIGEWUM, 2021) as well as its impact on the communication between students and lecturers during their internships. The third metaphor is the *straw man*. This metaphor helps to describe how substitute figures are used as a replacement for the phenomena themselves. One example from the pandemic is that it was not the digital tools themselves that prevented physical contact; rather, contact was to be avoided because of the pandemic and legal mandates. Only by overcoming the imperative of digitalization and the constraints imposed does it seem reasonable to think constructively about digitalization as an option in educational settings and internships.

According to Schmitt (2017a, b), metaphors fulfill various functions that are closely tied to the contexts in which they are used (ibid., 8). They reduce the complexity of facts through descriptions that are close to everyday life and offer concepts that were seemingly missing before. Metaphors are "powerful cultural patterns of interpretation" (Schmitt, 2022, 246) whose power and dominance seem to increase with their simultaneous complexity reduction. This explains why

metaphors could establish themselves in the scientific discourse on digitalization in social work during the pandemic and develop their effective power. In the context of higher education, they served as carriers or transmitters of critiques of existing conditions, which became understandable and describable to a particular extent.

Before discussing frequently invoked explanatory patterns for this development and reflecting deeper on the applied metaphors, we will define our theoretical framework. Therefore, we will distinguish between the concept of "digitality" and the concept of "digitalization."

11.2.1 Theoretical Framework: Digitality as a Hermeneutic Concept of Practices

Generally, we assume that due to the pressure to act swiftly within the measures of the pandemic, there was simply not enough time to systematically reflect the transfer of analog educational settings into digital spaces. While the implication of digital learning settings was previously only viewed with moderate pressure to act (Kutscher et al., 2020), the creation of digital learning settings became an imperative during the pandemic, often with the character of an order. The force with which changes and adaptations for teaching and practice became necessary inevitably led to excessive demands, which called for immediate action beyond a systematic or plannable nature.

To avoid such flawed reactions, our reflection on the emerging developments in higher education during the pandemic requires a broader theoretical framework that enables a more grounded understanding of the practices. For a deeper understanding of this situation, we will use the hermeneutic concept of "doing digitality" in everyday situations as defined by Weinhardt (2022) and Schmitz et al. (2022).

> The reflections on 'doing digitality' focus on two central assumptions: (a) what is of interest are the practices, i.e., what professionals and their advice seekers concretely do with digital things (doing digitality), and (b) not all of these practices are introduced into organizations and fields of action as an ordered social innovation in the form of a digitalization strategy, but rather have their origins in the long-established everyday use of digital things. (Schmitz et al., 2022, 175)

Using this concept, it is possible to reconstruct and understand digital requirements and the use of digital tools during the pandemic, which opened an "arena for necessary experimentation" (ibid., 174) and pushed the criteria of feasibility and data protection from the years before into the background. A hermeneutic and reconstructive approach helps us reconsider and understand the changes during the pandemic and the conditions, motifs, and actions of the involved subjects. While the concept of digitality directs its focus on the social processes and the concrete actions and strategies of the involved subjects, the concept of "digitalization" is a much more technical term that focuses mainly on the use of technical tools for intended changes and innovations at organizations (cf. ibid., 176).

11.2.2 Focused Through a Burning Glass: A Simultaneous Lack of Digitality and a "Digitalization Push"

Studies in social work practice show that the pandemic-related restrictions were met with "creatively diverse ideas of the telephone as well as digital communication" (Meyer & Buschle, 2020, 5), which resulted from insufficient resources to react with alternative means. In addition, there was a critical view anchored in social work toward digital transformation in regard to the "absorbing of uncertainties" (Waag, 2021, 85), activities which were defined by professionals as one "core area" of their work (ibid.).

This effect becomes even more visible when the digitalization of practice has failed to materialize or where resistance is particularly strong. Social work practice had shifted—wherever possible—to a "home office," a term used in Germany to describe work-from-home settings. This shift highlighted the lack of adequate digital equipment, devices, and access to internal network systems. Nevertheless, this shift was associated with hopes of a "digitalization push" (ibid., 14), especially at institutions that had "slept through" digitalization (ibid.) or had "ignored" it prior, e.g., due to rejectionist attitudes.

From the perspective of students, this meant that social work practices and places for internships had to adjust to radically new situations. Students had to "establish themselves" digitally. At the same time, social work practice was busy developing concepts to ensure ongoing operations. Uncertainties regarding upcoming internships were pre-programmed. As such it was not clear whether internships could be started or if they were postponed or suspended (Traus et al., 2020, 7), which could have resulted in unplanned postponements of studies, resulting in calls for exceptions for students (ibid., 36).

Furthermore, students were confronted with a "'forced' digitalization" (Mangold & Schröer, 2022, 164) of university teaching and campus life. As consumers and co-producers of teaching, they were equally forced and challenged to engage in the sudden changes. The "digitalization of teaching" (Kochskämper & Lips, 2022, 169) was a central category for students (ibid.). "Doing digitality" became an inescapable ad-hoc reality for students; thus, previous practices had to be adapted and applied to new contexts within a noticeably short time without fully knowing what to expect. The burning glass effect became even more visible, as much less consideration was given to digitalization in social work practice fields.

11.2.3 The Straw Man Effect: Blaming Digitalization as a Contact Preventer

Digitalization during the pandemic was often described as a disturbance that prevented physical contact. Students and lecturers often perceived digital teaching and learning formats as something that avoided contact, instead of realizing that the

restrictions were designed to maintain social distancing. Bizer et al. (2009) conducted research on the straw man figure as a rhetorical technique: "The straw man technique takes place when an opponent's argument or position is distorted or oversimplified so that it can easily be refuted" (Bizer et al., 2009, 216). The method introduces an argument into the discussion that supposedly addresses the opponent's position and, at the same time, provides arguments that can be easily adapted. By introducing the straw man, the opposing position is rendered defenseless while one's own position is strengthened (Glaser, 2019).

Strawman's arguments can be found in many reflections and statements about the supposedly contact-avoiding character of digital settings in social work education. Insights into student life at the beginning of the pandemic—apart from their clear criticism of the transfer from analog to digital means—reveal the perceived threat of excessive demands (Bunjes, 2020; Bäumker, 2021). They reveal that student life at the time was characterized by complex challenges. The criticism of digital practices that suddenly replaced previously established and largely analog routines apparently serves to reduce complexity. Recognizing their substitute character, however, it becomes clear that, in many cases, the resentment should have been directed toward the complex and sometimes irresolvable rules and guidelines established at the political and organizational level and, therefore, should have been discussed and negotiated there.

Since no further data exist to substantiate this, the introduction of the straw man at this point remains what Schmitt (2017a, b) calls a "forcible simplification" (ibid., 19) that, at the same time, points to an existing research desideratum. Despite this "abbreviation of the research process" (ibid., 19), the following two conclusions can already be drawn for the development of practice models for digital support in social work practice education:

1. In the acute phase of the pandemic, digital things[4] were used, at least in part, to "keep a system running" that had already shown deficiencies beforehand. Bunjes (2020) noted quite appreciatively in his blog post: "In retrospect, it is astonishing how quickly an institution *was able to* act with its users—probably because it *had* to—and that ad-hoc digital solutions in the form of forums, digital conferences via Zoom/Teams, or chat rooms were now deployed and used not only to *accompany,* but *mainly* to teach" (ibid.). At the same time, criticism of the increased pace of changes in higher education is formulated: "If we as lecturers want to act constructively and in the interest of the students, it cannot be a matter of restoring the status quo of the traditional teaching and examination system online as quickly as possible" (Villa Braslawski et al., 2020).
2. Digital educational settings and digital supervision of social work practice education did not prevent contact but rather made it possible within the regulatory frameworks of the time. However, due to the then-required haste, it would not be adequate to speak of an exemplary and goal-oriented implementation. New quality standards for digital educational settings should not be derived from the

[4] Term used in the sense of the "availableness" of artifacts (Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon).

digitalization imperatives that were created in states of emergency. Instead, a more thorough reflection is needed: "Depending on the discipline, subject, and learning objectives, online teaching takes a specific form. There are no blanket solutions. This means additional work for instructors and administrators" (Ibid.). Today, the main task is not simply to transfer analog formats into digital ones. Rather, it is a matter of systematic conceptualization with the necessary professional autonomy of academic disciplines. While various approaches are already being tested, a systematic analysis of successful practices is still pending (Mittmann et al., 2023, 446) and will be addressed in a current PhD thesis on the situation in Germany (ibid.).

11.3 Fostering Productive Understanding: Systematic Designs for Digital Internship Support

One conclusion of the previous analyses stemmed from a possible premature framing of the new situation with too early conclusions. Streck et al. (2022) made this visible along the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, highlighting the multiple perspectives on the challenges during the crisis. The involved items and actors were in a constant state of flux and thus had to be repeatedly referenced to one another (cf. ibid., 16f.). The different components of the kaleidoscope represent data and categories whose observation and perception during the pandemic depended on the perspectives of the individual elements (Schmitt, 2017a, 18). As digitalization gradually enters the practice fields of social work, the challenges that all actors need to deal with are also continuously changing. A recognition of changeability depending on the observer's perspective can be regarded as the first step for an approach to a planned and systematic process for the digitalization of educational settings and social work practice education.

11.3.1 "Good Practices" Result from Systematic Digitalization

Digitality and digitalization are partial processes that run parallel to each other and result in a field of tension in which "digital things and associated practices of action are constantly subject to a permanent cultural transformation" (Weinhardt, 2021). Digitalization presented itself differently in each field of social work during the pandemic and entailed different practices. This is due to the impossibility of planning and the highly individual ad-hoc digitalization, thus contrasting with a more systematic approach. While the pandemic has set many things in motion, it can be criticized that the discourse was more often about equipment and less about "ensuring professional quality in the context [of] digitalization developments" (Seelmeyer

& Kutscher, 2021, 24). Processes, strategies, and practices have been realized and developed further "in-actu" to align with their respective context.

Consequently, when asked about "good practices" or "best practices" in the context of a pandemic-related digitalization, this can be met with a change of perspective: The "lockdown" situation of the pandemic has, for example, led to increased attention in the field of online counseling (Reindl & Engelhardt, 2021, 118), which, however, entered the pandemic with different prerequisites. Although it would be obvious to use online counseling as a "good practice" case, it is challenging to transfer it adequately to other contexts without contextualization—especially since the requirements of online counseling are inherently closer to the "digital."

There continue to be numerous efforts to bring higher education in line with digital transformation. However, both structurally and thematically, these efforts are lagging behind what would be appropriate for the times (Mayrberger, 2021, 46). Particularly in the aftermath of the "Corona semester," challenges have become apparent that, not only can be classified under the burning glass effect, but also made it clear, above all, that it takes time to react to the changed situation. In a survey of students at the University of Heidelberg during the pandemic, it became clear that the first thing that had to be done was to equip as many students as possible with digital tools and ensure that the university could set up suitable infrastructures. The provision of spaces—including digital ones—was a major challenge, although an awareness of the problem increasingly developed during the semester (Feucht & Reif, 2022). On the part of the students, the use of digital media has increased significantly, as expected. It was also a way to keep in touch with fellow students, which is also visible in another small-scale study at the University of Tübingen (Brahm & Pumptow, 2021, 130).

The digitalization of teaching and practice is, therefore, not an end in itself and must evolve over time; resistance at the beginning is neither surprising nor purposeful. Therefore, this must, for example, be done in a way to allow students to encounter each other in a more targeted manner, which was a central challenge during the pandemic. Individual requirements need to be considered; depending on the semester of study and the context, appropriately adapted concepts and methods are needed (Malewski et al., 2021, 111f.).

The interdependent burning glass effects and the outcomes of the push for digitalization can be analyzed alongside the kaleidoscope metaphor by looking at the individual components of the situation and evaluating them over a longer period. Particularly in a retrospective assessment of the situation, it becomes clear that the creation of suitable framework conditions was and is a central prerequisite to potentially increase the use of digitalization. If "good practices" are to be derived, they must be considered in the context of the respective setting and then developed in line with it. For this purpose, digitality should be consistently argued as an irrevocable framework.

11.3.2 Digitalization and Digitality as Fundamental Concepts for Internship Support

Regarding the concept of digitality, it was already clear before the pandemic that there was "no outside" of it (Grünberger, 2023, 2) and the shift towards digitality was inevitable. This is supported not only by the fundamentally high prevalence of digital media but also by contemporary media activities and the importance of digital media in everyday life (Beranek, 2021). In terms of social work practice education and digital internship support, this means that sustainable structures must be developed step by step to continue the process. Students are thus caught in the tension between a digital deficiency in the practice or training situation, the elimination of this deficiency, and the lack of clarity regarding compensation for internships that cannot take place. Universities, practitioners, and students were obviously overwhelmed by the ad-hoc situation during the pandemic.

For the winter semester 2020/2021, Emden-Leer University of Applied Sciences granted its students the option to make up internships at a later date; to have internships that had already been started recognized if at least 50 percent of the internship had been completed at the time of a corona-related dropout; or, in certain cases, to take an examination as an alternative solution (Emden-Leer University of Applied Sciences 2021). With similar regulations, universities met the challenges in implementing compulsory internships within the educational framework.

At this point, digitalization had not yet gained a systematic role in the interface of studies and internships; it was simply unavoidable in the context of the lockdown situation. Here, the focus was increasingly on a lack of technical equipment, e.g., inadequate Internet connections (Becker & Jäger-Jürgens, 2021, 45f.), and students expressed a desire for the quality of online teaching to improve during this time. (ibid., 66). Nevertheless, the benefits of online-supported teaching have also been recognized (ibid., 67). Practices established in the Corona semester thus require continuous revision and should be reflected further in subject-related didactic developments. By differentiating didactics and practices, the lack of contact or exchange among students can thus be countered (ibid., 64). Before the pandemic, many potential methods had been described, such as lecturers "[having] gain[ed] new methods and tools through the possibilities of digitalization, with which classic event formats could be upgraded to digital teaching-learning scenarios" (Getto et al., 2018, 17f.). The narratives of incompatibility between social work and digitalization (Busche-Baumann & Oehlmann, 2021, 10) have been contrasted by spaces of possibility that have not yet fully unfolded, even in current times.

A prominent example often invoked is data protection considerations, which were extensively discussed at the beginning of the pandemic (e.g., for community work, Martínez Calero and Grumbrecht 2021). In this context, by no means did the pandemic situation alone challenge social work regarding the handling of data in the digital space; the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) had introduced legal framework conditions more than 5 years prior that have also been relevant for social work since then. Therefore, a link with professional reality became necessary

(Müller, 2019). At the time, the use of platforms such as "WhatsApp" also stood between the poles of "data protection and lifeworld orientation" (Beranek & Blumenschein, 2019.

Generally, before the pandemic, the pressure to implement a digital strategy was not very high on the agenda in many practice fields of social work—although there was an awareness that the topic could not be avoided (Kutscher et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the "if" rather than the "how" was often discussed, so the excessive demands at the beginning of the pandemic were all the greater. From this, it can be inferred that the "overload momentum" was greater than it would have been if the issues had been given a higher priority beforehand.

The reasons for this may be manifold: In addition to the issue of prioritization, a lack of resources or insufficient competencies might apply. Current and future practices are thus becoming increasingly important. The straw man argument and the burning glass metaphor should be gradually overcome in this context. The lack of anchoring of digital literacy in study programs such as social work has been appropriately attributed to increasing skepticism of the added value of digital teaching (Weimann-Sandig et al., 2022, 121). Targeted use can help to increase "digital media and information literacy among students" and thus equip them for a future shaped by digitality (ibid., 125). Furthermore, digitalization has helped to facilitate communication in educational settings instead of preventing it.

A concluding thesis would be that the design of digital settings for social work education and social work practice education depends on a systematic reflection of the processes and effects of digitalization and digitality to develop concepts and methods to meet current challenges. In view of the pandemic, digitalization must not and should not be understood as a "contact-preventer," but rather as a "contact-enabler," even more so if we look to the future. If digitality is taken seriously, and if the inevitable shift towards digitality is accepted, there will also be numerous scenarios in which digitalization contributes to connectedness in social work. Social work is only now on its way to developing "good" and "best practices" in this field.

11.4 Conclusion: Shaping Digitalization Beyond the Imperatives of the Pandemic

This chapter primarily highlights the impossibility of deriving "good" or "best practices" for the digital support of social work practice education from pandemic-related measures. This can be better understood alongside a reflection of the burning glass metaphor and the straw man argument. Both terms highlight not only the lack of digital infrastructure at universities as well as in professional practice but also the resistance that resulted from the constraints of the pandemic, the feelings of being overwhelmed, and the desire to reduce the complexity of the pandemic situation. In addition, applying the kaleidoscope metaphor also allows us to recognize the multiple potentials and possibilities of digitality alongside already existing digital

practices to, ultimately, be able to align them more strongly with planned and purposeful digitalization. Through this way, problematic practices can be re-examined for future concepts. As Pfister (2017) explained: "Internships in social work practice should be conducted in a reflective manner" (ibid., 128). This is also how digital approaches should be used.

Our thoughts and attitudes toward digital settings must be separated from the imperatives of the pandemic and the related concerns of students and lecturers alike. A planned and systematic development of innovative approaches can succeed as soon as a broader form of digitalization, which includes ethical implications as well as necessary preconditions for more comprehensive participation, is under consideration. A reflexive attitude toward digitalization in social work involves rejecting digitalization as an end in itself and advocating for the aspects that satisfy both legal and professional standards while placing the users and their needs at the center.

On the conditions and development of such settings, more recent empirical data from further research are needed. Evaluations conducted by universities during the pandemic are only of limited use for deriving best practices for current situations. Existing data rarely take into account infrastructural and organizational changes that the pandemic made imperative and may have led to systematized digitalization processes at universities and practice institutions in the meantime. The challenge of any research project dealing with the digital accompaniment of social work practice education in social work programs is the simultaneous consideration of the degree of digitalization of the universities as well as the practice institutions. Successful digital support in this important phase of studies requires sufficient hardware and software equipment as well as the necessary reflective and analytical skills on both sides.

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Part III
The Present and the Future of Social Work Practice Education: A Global View

Chapter 12
Social Work Education in the USA: Lessons Learned from the Pandemic (and Beyond)

Darla Spence Coffey and Deana F. Morrow

12.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic created an abrupt and colossal impact on higher education in the United States of America (USA). The World Health Organization recognized COVID-19 as a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, and universities across the USA rapidly shut down campus-based operations to minimize the spread of the virus (Washburn et al., 2021). Although online education was already firmly established in the U.S. prior to the pandemic, face-to-face students were abruptly sent home from class and university housing, and faculty were directed to rapidly shift face-to-face educational instruction to online teaching modalities. Students who were engaged in internships and related experiential learning activities were directed to return home from placement sites for their own protection and the protection of others (Davis & Mirick, 2021).

The sharp pivot to remote teaching and learning for students and faculty accustomed to classroom-based environments created stress for both, many of whom were either unfamiliar or uncomfortable with virtual teaching and learning (Christensen et al., 2023; Hitchcock et al., 2021; Scheffert et al., 2021). For all

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students (virtual or face-to-face), field education was disrupted in the USA by the sudden closing of internship sites (Davis & Mirick, 2021). Even in cases where services identified as essential to the common good remained open, student interns were often sent home for safety reasons or, in other cases, because universities cancelled internships in an effort to minimize spread of the virus within campus communities.

In addition to classroom learning and field education disruptions, many students experienced stressful life changes related to campus closure, including returning home to live with family, finding new housing, and losing employment and income due to the widespread business shutdown. They added caregiving responsibilities due to school and daycare closures (Scheffert et al., 2021). As news reports of severe illness and death due to the COVID-19 virus grew, the fear of contracting COVID-19 became considerable and widespread (Selman et al., 2021; Wiederhold, 2023). According to a survey by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) (2020), more than 80% of students reported their mental health had been adversely affected by the pandemic. Additionally, most students reported financial difficulties related to social distancing requirements and concerns about graduating on time.

While social work faculty, administrators, and staff were, themselves, navigating the pandemic crisis, they also quickly developed creative policies, trainings, and methods to support student academic success and on-time graduation. The human impact of the pandemic on students created an immediate need for trauma-informed teaching. Hitchcock et al. (2021) identified a trauma-informed teaching approach that included a commitment to student empowerment, academic respect, social support, and cultural, historical, and gender contexts. Barros-Lane et al. (2021) found that recognizing the pandemic as a disaster was a useful context for responding to student learning needs. They incorporated trauma-informed themes into pandemic-era teaching, which included fostering student safety, program-generated human connections, and programmatic transparency. The closing of field internship sites created particular challenges for students in achieving social work competencies (Council on Social Work Education, 2015)[1] and completing required field hours in a timely manner. Forced termination of on-site fieldwork provoked a host of student and client reactions, including anger, sadness, guilt, and worry (Szczygiel & Embery-Fertitta, 2021). Social work field educators collaborated across programs and nationally with CSWE to develop options for remote field education. Examples included increased use of tele-mental health and remote assessment (Canada et al., 2021), hybrid models of intervention (Melero et al., 2021), virtual professional development training, remote supervision, off-site policy reviews and policy development, and public awareness campaigns. Additionally, CSWE modified field hour requirements and in-person internship requirements (specific details are shared later in this chapter).

[1] CSWE-accredited social work programs must demonstrate student achievement of nine competencies and related social work behaviors.

Despite the many challenges of the pandemic, students, faculty, staff, and administrators demonstrated resilience that reflects social work values (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, 2022; National Association of Social Workers, 2020a, b). CSWE created a national clearinghouse for the exchange of educational ideas and information, and programs across the nation collaborated to share ideas and offer support to each other via national listservs. Most importantly, social work education continued uninterrupted (despite being disrupted). Students were supported, and educators worked diligently to ensure opportunities for them to achieve their educational requirements and graduate on time.

This chapter will discuss specific components of navigating social work education in the USA during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will discuss the role of CSWE and its Board of Accreditation in supporting social work education programs during this national crisis, programmatic innovations born of the pandemic, and lessons learned for the continuing improvement and evolution of social work education in the USA.

12.2 Support to Social Work Programs

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the national body for social work education in the USA (and its territories). Providing support to over 900 programs (at the bachelor's, master's and doctoral levels) during this difficult and challenging time became a priority for the Council. In the early days of the pandemic, CSWE created an online discussion community through its corporate website so that programs could share resources, ask questions, and exchange pandemic-related ideas and strategies. Programs could enter programmatic innovations for classroom or field experience activities, virtual classroom exercises, reading lists, assignments, and more in an editable Excel Spreadsheet or otherwise share resources on the website (many examples offered in this chapter come from this virtual compendium of resources). In addition, CSWE partnered with a group of public health social workers who developed a series of PowerPoint slide decks, making them available (and editable) for programs interested in introducing a public health perspective in their programs, a perspective particularly appropriate for the time.

It became apparent that the moment called for increased communication and collaboration among other social work organizations was necessary. From March 2020 through February 2022, and in partnership with two other national social work organizations, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the national social work professional organization, and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the body that develops and administers the social work licensure examination that all states in the U.S. utilize, the three organizations published regular newsletter-type communications under the title, *Social Work Responds*, to their respective members. This historic collaboration between the three organizations set the stage for increased communication and collaboration that continues to this day.

Key to its aim to be supportive and responsive, the CSWE partnership with its Board of Accreditation (formerly known as the CSWE Commission on Accreditation) was strengthened during this time. The Board of Accreditation, the accrediting body for social work education, made modifications in its accreditation standards in the face of the pandemic that were critically important to social work programs across the country. Housed within the larger CSWE association, the Board is recognized by the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to confer accreditation for undergraduate and graduate social work education programs in the USA and its territories (Council on Social Work Education, 2023). In support of social work education programs grappling with the disruptive impact of the pandemic, the Board authorized a series of temporary modifications to accreditation requirements.

In concert with CSWE, the Board publicly affirmed that the safety of students, educators, social workers, clients, and communities is paramount. The Board's first official pandemic-related modifications to accreditation requirements were announced on March 20, 2020 (CSWE Commission on Accreditation, 2020a). Among the modifications was that accreditation site visits would shift from traditional on-site in-person meetings to virtual site visits. Additionally, programs were granted the option to request a time extension for submitting accreditation and reaffirmation documents due to academic disruption caused by the pandemic. The Board also affirmed its openness and flexibility in reviewing program assessment outcomes that might be negatively impacted by the toll the pandemic took on students. In addition, the Board expanded its requirement for "in-person contact" in field education by approving remote activities such as virtual meetings, field-related remote assignments, telehealth engagement, and virtual professional development training. There were no changes at that time regarding the minimum number of required field hours (400 h at the baccalaureate level and 900 h at the master's level).[2]

However, with the rapid and exponential increases in COVID-19 cases spreading across the USA, the Board issued a second accreditation modification statement on March 25, 2020 (CSWE Commission on Accreditation, 2020b). This statement permitted programs to, at their discretion, incorporate a reduction in required field hours. Programs where students had completed 85% of required field hours (i.e., a minimum of 340 of 400 h required at the baccalaureate level and 765 of 900 h required at the master's level) would be considered as meeting field education accreditation requirements. The reduced field hours option was permitted through December 31, 2020. As the pandemic raged into 2021, the Board then extended the field hour reductions and the other previously noted accreditation modifications to December 31, 2021 (CSWE Commission on Accreditation, 2020c). The 2021 modifications also included greater flexibility for students to complete field education at their current places of employment, provided their activities were consistent with required social work competencies (Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

[2] CSWE accredits social work programs at the baccalaureate degree level, the master's degree level, and the professional practice doctorate degree level. Field internships are required at the baccalaureate and master's degree levels.

These modifications, collectively, supported educators and students with greater flexibility and expanded opportunities for meeting academic requirements and field hours in support of academic success and on-time graduation.

12.3 Programmatic Innovations

Programs made numerous structural and curricular changes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like the rest of the world, programs in the USA began the pandemic thinking that this would be a time-limited interruption in their operations, but this ultimately turned into a lengthy and continuing phenomenon, and programs were faced with four critical and simultaneous challenges:

1. Supporting social work faculty who had never taught online.
2. Ensuring that all students had access to stable internet connections and equipment to engage in online learning.
3. Pivoting in-person classroom teaching to subjects more appropriate for virtual teaching and learning.
4. Ensuring that students continued to have access to rich in vivo learning experiences (i.e., field practicum).

In the early days of the pandemic, many schools proactively communicated existing policies and procedures for "untimely interruption of field education" that were developed prior to the pandemic in response to other natural and man-made. When it became clear that the need for safety and social isolation procedures would continue for an indeterminate period of time, programs were challenged to be more innovative so as to ensure student learning during this unusual time. Such developments included the creation of clinics (including but not limited to clinics that offered COVID-19 testing and vaccination), strengthening interprofessional collaboration, participating in an expansion of the Medical Service Corp through a pandemic-born collaboration, Students Assist America (American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, 2023) which provided students opportunities for contract tracing and assisting individuals, families and communities in accessing vaccine sites. Many students began to learn the processes, ethics and logistics of telehealth (and tele-mental health).

As mandated quarantining and social distancing continued, faculty became acutely aware that methods for in-person teaching in the classroom were quite different compared to online teaching, and schools and programs ramped up efforts to support faculty to engage in high-quality virtual teaching, learning and assessment. While virtual platforms offered ways to replicate small group work, a foundation of social work education, faculty also felt the need to think differently about and make changes to their planned course outlines, introducing or emphasizing new topics.

For example, a number of programs indicated to CSWE that they used this time to strengthen their attention to "macro" social work practice. Disparities in health outcomes in relation to COVID-19 became glaringly obvious (Lopez et al., 2021),

elevating the role and impact of social determinants of health, a clear social work domain. This led some programs to focus explicitly on developing social workers-as-leaders to lead such discussions/efforts. Some programs focused on the role that social workers can/should play in supporting the civic engagement of all citizens and accessed resources from entities such as Voting is Social Work (2023). Others used this time to engage students in developing content that could be used to communicate the value of social work (such as infographics and impact statements) (Council on Social Work Education, n.d.).

As the rest of the world was learning how to offer virtual support and services, social work faculty encouraged students to avail themselves of different kinds of experiential learning opportunities. For example, students in one program were encouraged to attend an online support group of recovering individuals offered by the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2023). Offering such learning opportunities through audio and/or visual virtual platforms became a core practice for social workers and social work students (Canada et al., 2021; Hirshi et al., 2022). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) lobbied successfully to ensure provider and insurance approval for audio-only, telehealth, and tele-mental health visits (National Association of Social Workers, 2020a, b).

Research classes embraced the emergent challenges of the pandemic and guided students in developing bibliographies of literature addressing the disparate effects of pandemics, unplanned termination of the social work relationship, the "dual pandemics" that reflected the reality in the USA of how COVID-19 and racial injustice(s) intersected. Others created assignments for students to develop focus group questions and/or surveys to identify agency and/or community needs as they related to the pandemic (Council on Social Work Education, n.d.). Additionally, several schools developed—and generously shared through CSWE-related communications—field education strategies for remote competency development to ensure that students had opportunities to learn and achieve social work competencies in virtual and other remote settings during the pandemic.

12.4 Student and Faculty Well-Being

As the pandemic persisted, concerns about student well-being rose to the surface. While there had been growing attention to the need to support students' mental health pre-pandemic (for example, Carello & Butler, 2015; Lemieux et al., 2010; Roulston et al., 2018), the additional stressors related to the pandemic, such as returning to live at home, loss of employment due to business shutdowns, and added caregiving responsibilities due to school and daycare closures, created almost unbearable stress for many social work students. While social work students typically demonstrate remarkable resilience, these added stressors overwhelmed the coping abilities of many students. As stated previously, CSWE conducted a survey of faculty, staff and students during this time that revealed that well over 80% of

students reported that their mental health had been negatively affected by the pandemic (Council on Social Work Education, 2020).

Teaching trauma theory and how to create and/or support trauma-informed systems of care had been central to a number of social work education programs in the USA; however, the pandemic required social work educators to view their students as subjects of trauma, which subsequently led to a decisive shift in teaching approach. Hitchcock et al. (2021) identify some of these elements explicitly, such as "teaching in crisis" and "understanding emotional and psychosocial responses of students during a crisis" (p. 84–84), and they urge social work educators to adopt a trauma-informed pedagogy in their teaching. Pacely et al. (2021) point out that while social work curricula and practicums often deal with emotionally challenging and even trauma-triggering content, the pandemic created an environment that transformed the "intellectual discussion" of such topics to one that was a lived experience for many. They encourage educators to create trauma-informed learning environments for their students. Barros-Lane et al. (2021) assessed student perceptions of a trauma-informed approach to the pandemic and found that programs' response to the pandemic "fostered a sense of safety, supported student autonomy, and created opportunities for connection" (p. 74).

We learned in our communications that a number of programs had begun to emphasize the importance of "self-care" as an essential skill for social workers prior to the pandemic. They shared that attention to self-care became even more important during this stressful period. One approach to self-care that came to the fore during the pandemic included teaching students to meditate (Pandya, 2022), which correlated with increased resiliency and competency. The number of webinars, publications, and continuing education offerings dedicated to the topic of self-care has multiplied during this time (for example, National Association of Social Workers, n.d.).

Students were not the only ones affected by the stressors of the pandemic; many faculty of social work education programs were struggling with the same issues. One pandemic-related employment impact is related to workload. Washburn et al. (2021) note that the financial stressors on institutions of higher education were exacerbated by the vicissitudes of the pandemic, and in many cases led to increased workload for faculty. Social work education program administrators needed to think about how to support both students and faculty during this time in new ways, framing this work as a justice and equity concern (Washburn et al., 2021).

12.5 Educational Programming Flexibility

The educational impact of the pandemic generated innovation and flexibility among social work educators across the USA. In recognizing the disaster-type impact of COVID-19 on human well-being, educators focused their attention on student wellness, mental health, and social support as a necessary context for learning (Gherardi

et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2021; Paceley et al., 2021). Educators offered flexibility with assignment due dates and engaged students through intentional "check-ins" to support them in coping with the deleterious effects of the pandemic. In addition, there was a decided shift towards mutuality within the teaching-learning exchange (Lee et al., 2021). Trauma-informed approaches to teaching promoted student empowerment and autonomy while also creating opportunities for educators to offer support and human connection with students (Barros-Lane et al., 2021).

Mitschke et al. (2021) developed a peer mentor program during the pandemic where graduate students were trained to offer peer support in a large social work education program. The program provided opportunities for students and faculty to meet virtually regularly to share information, resources, and mutual support. Outcomes from the program demonstrated that participants felt more connected, better informed about program changes during the pandemic, and emotionally supported by their academic programs.

These approaches to integrating an ethic of care for students concurrent with meeting academic standards represent an enhanced commitment to student-centered teaching and learning that will benefit social work education well beyond the pandemic era.

12.6 Integrating Employment with Field Education

CSWE accreditation standards in place at the time of the pandemic (Council on Social Work Education, 2015) were restrictive with regard to students completing field education requirements at their place of employment. According to accreditation standards in place at the time, "To ensure the role of the student as a learner, student assignments and field education supervision are not the same as those of the students' employment (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 13). Field internship hours and related supervision were required to be separate from a student's employment work role, even if the student was employed in a social work practice setting.

The pandemic modifications to accreditation standards (CSWE Commission on Accreditation, 2020b, c) that allowed students to count employment hours toward required field hours, provided that employment activities aligned with CSWE competencies, represented a significant shift for social work education. With this change, employment activities that were clearly aligned with CSWE competencies could now count toward meeting field education requirements. This pandemic-related modification to accreditation requirements also supported a social justice perspective such that students in practice social work settings no longer had to reduce employment hours to complete field requirements. This change fostered equity and inclusion for all students in meeting field education requirements.

12.7 Online Learning and Telehealth

The pivot to online education and virtual practice prompted universities to enhance faculty and student preparedness for online learning and virtual services. The growing emphasis on remote learning and virtual, or remote, practice is a pandemic lesson that will continue to drive social work education and practice for the future. Mishna et al. (2021) found that the pandemic prompted an increase in the use of digital practice, including digital communications, hybrid services, and e-services. They highlighted that social work education has been slow to prepare students for digital services. Their recommendations for the future included preparing students to navigate boundaries, ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and secure documentation in virtual practice.

Canada et al. (2021) shifted a student-led university-based behavioral health clinic from face-to-face to virtual in response to the pandemic-related campus closure. Services included assessment and intervention using virtual meeting software as well as phone check-ins. They found that client symptoms remained stable after the shift to virtual service and that client no-show and cancellation rates did not decrease.

The use of telehealth and other digital-based services has been ongoing since the pandemic and is expected to grow (Reese, 2022; Wiederhold, 2023). Social work education must prepare students to use artificial intelligence and other digital technologies to support ethical and competent practice. The social work profession is also called upon to advance policy development and advocacy for widespread broadband access and technology competence.

12.8 Integrating Classroom Seminars with Field Hours

One modification made during the pandemic reaped unforeseen benefits to students and faculty alike, which involved counting classroom seminars as "field hours" to facilitate the integration of theory and practice. Classroom seminars (though, in this case, virtual classrooms) designed to explicitly support such integration were once a staple of many social work programs, but over time many had eliminated such courses in efforts to streamline the curriculum and reduce hours/credits that were costly to students. Allowing programs to count such classroom hours toward the number of required field hours not only alleviated pressure in finding safe field learning environments for students during this time but (re)introduced the value of facilitated integration and reflection across fields and courses. This pandemic-related modification is now a permanent expectation in the 2022 revision to accreditation standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2022).

12.9 Supporting the Signature Pedagogy

In its 2008 EPAS (Council on Social Work Education, 2008), the CSWE BOA declared field education as its "signature pedagogy." "Signature pedagogy is a central form of teaching and learning to socialize students to perform the role of practitioner—it contains pedagogical norms with which to connect and integrate theory and practice" (Council on Social Work Education, 2008, p. 8). Declaring the primacy of field education was a way to further integrate field and classroom learning and beseech programs to strengthen their commitment to learning integration. However, in many cases, the relationship between programs, agencies, and organizations that provide field education to students is too often one-sided. Field sites can be viewed as a resource to students, yet it is also important to recognize the numerous challenges that the agency faces and the additional work involved in supervising students. Given the numerous challenges (and, in some cases, crises) that the pandemic wrought upon the agencies and organizations where students were placed, social work programs more directly and explicitly became a resource to the agencies, offering much-needed support and assistance to these vital community partners.

12.10 Sustaining the Lessons Learned

Many innovations and modifications that emerged in social work education during the pandemic have morphed into sustained improvements for the profession. These sustained changes and improvements include the following:

1. *Enhanced Educational Pedagogy*. Digital learning and online pedagogy have become standardized throughout social work education. Online teaching methods and skills that emerged rapidly during the pandemic have continued to expand. Digital learning is now a mainstay component of social work education.
2. *Expansion of Field Education*. The pandemic-related expansion of field education to include remote activities and options for completing internships at a student's place of employment have been well-received by students and faculty alike. This expanded conceptualization of the field has now been codified into the next generation of social work education accreditation standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2022). These standards, approved in 2022, allow for field education internships in a student's place of employment provided their activities are in alignment with social work education competencies.
3. *Attention to Student and Faculty Well-Being*. The attention to self-care and student and faculty mental well-being that became heightened during the pandemic is now regularly integrated into social work education and has gained increased attention in the literature (Collins, 2020; Maddock & McCusker, 2022; O'Neill et al., 2019). Additionally, social work educators are more readily incorporating trauma-informed content into their teaching (Goodwin & Tiderington, 2022; Sanders, 2021).

4. *Improved Organizational Collaboration*. The pandemic-precipitated shared messaging and communications from the leading social work organizations—the Council on Social Work Education, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Association of Social Work Boards—was a powerful moment in acknowledging the complementary and integrated missions of each organization. These collaborations bode well for the future of social work education and professional social work practice. Continued collaborations will further integrate the social work profession from education to practice.

12.11 Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic was riveting and disruptive for social work education—and for higher education in general—across the U.S. This disruption, however, also prompted innovative adaptation and resilience as educators and students adjusted to the crisis. Social work educators quickly shifted from in-person to virtual teaching and learning methods. They recognized the mental and emotional toll of the pandemic on students and incorporated extra support for student wellness into the classroom milieu. They also developed innovations supporting student peer mentorship programs and mental health resources and expanded programmatic communications with students. The need to teach "self-care" became critically important.

Field education expanded significantly with the incorporation of telehealth and the development of creative remote activities to facilitate student achievement of required social work competencies. Programs created explicit opportunities to better integrate field and classroom learning. There were new opportunities for students to integrate field learning into their existing employment as long as the employment-based activities were consistent with meeting social work competencies. Social work education programs strengthened their partnership with their field sites. Social work education and practice at the national level became more broadly and deeply integrated across leadership organizations. National organizations, including the Council on Social Work Education, the National Association of Social Workers, and the Association of Social Work Boards, met regularly and collaborated to support students, educators, educational programming, and community-based social work practice.

With time and distance from the height of the pandemic, we can affirm these educational changes have been for the better. Social work education became more flexible, adaptable, and student-centered. Educators generated creative and innovative crisis-informed changes. They demonstrated an impregnable commitment to helping students continue timely educational progress and on-time graduation. These changes will continue to shape social work education for the future.

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Chapter 13
Social Work Practice Education in Asia Pacific: Recent History, Responding to the Pandemic and Future Perspectives

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13.1 Introduction

Social work education in the Asia Pacific has a diverse history of development in the context of increasing demand for social workers in many countries across the region. This chapter outlines recent developments and the current situation of social work practice and education in the Asia Pacific, specifically the place of social work practice education. Some examples of how social work educators responded to the pandemic in relation to social work practice education are provided using examples from countries such as Australia, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Finally, the chapter outlines some key challenges and opportunities facing social work education and practice generally in the region as well as some of the specific issues for social work practice education in the post-pandemic context.

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13.2 Social Work Practice in Asia Pacific

The Asia Pacific Region incorporates a vast geographic area with a diverse range of countries. The region is generally considered to include East Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Korea), South East Asia (e.g., Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand), South Asia (e.g., India, Bangladesh, Pakistan), and Oceania (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Pacific Island countries). Within this regional context, social work has a diverse history of development. For example, social work roles and formal social work training courses were established in countries such as Australia and India from the 1930s and 1940s, in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka from the 1950s, and in countries such as Nepal and Vietnam from the 1990s (UNICEF, 2018). While the growth of social work has been slow over many years or only in its infancy in some countries in the region, in others there has been recent and very rapid growth of the profession. For example, China is reported to have trained more than 1 million people in social work in the decade from 2010 to 2020. By 2018, over 1.2 million professional social workers were employed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Höjer et al., 2022). It should also be noted that the historical development of social work in most countries across the region has been strongly influenced by social work perspectives and models from Great Britain, Europe and the USA, often within the broader context of historical colonization, which continues to present challenges for indigenized Asia Pacific social work. The notion that a "one size fits all" Western model of social work can be adopted in what is a culturally diverse range of countries in the region is problematic and a process that may sometimes mirror elements of the oppressive practices seen with the historical colonization of countries. At the same time, in the context of globalization and increasing socio-economic development, many countries in the region are looking at new and changing roles in social work.

Given the variations in history and the stage of development of social work in different countries across the region, generalizations about the status of social work at the regional level must be made with caution. What is clear is that in many countries, governments are making renewed moves to further develop the social services sector and workforce to address a range of challenges, including the welfare and wellbeing of children. For example, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) made the "Hanoi Declaration" on strengthening social work in member countries in 2020 and has agreed to a multi-year strategy to develop all aspects of social work. Key aspects of the strategy include recognition of social work in legislation and policy, development of social work education, and workforce strategies and initiatives to improve pay and employment conditions, all of which will improve social work status in the community. The ASEAN strategy also argues for the importance of strengthening the role of social work, noting that of the 169 targets underpinning the UN Sustainable Development Goals, ASEAN countries will need effective social services to achieve 65% of these targets (ASEAN, 2021). Some key regional challenges where social work can be part of the response include the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, natural and people-made

disasters and response, poverty and inequality, protection and wellbeing of children, gender equality and gender-based violence, movements of people across borders and mental health and wellbeing.

As social work further develops across the region in the future, some common issues have been identified. These include the diverse history of development of social work across a vast region with different countries and cultural contexts; different definitions of social work and roles for social workers in different countries and different areas or practices; social work being part of the social services workforce that includes a range of paraprofessionals and volunteers; varying levels of recognition in legislation, policy and formal accreditation processes; often low pay and recognition for social workers with limited career progression where the social services system is less developed and sometimes negative public perceptions of social work (ASEAN, 2021; Shek et al., 2017).

13.3 Social Work Education in Asia Pacific

The development of social work education in the Asia Pacific region mirrors the development of social work practice more broadly. Some countries have had university-based social work courses for many decades, while for others formal social work education is a relatively new development as social work roles in a country have expanded (UNICEF, 2018). While some countries in the region have only a few social work education providers, others such as China have experienced recent rapid expansion such that in 2019 China had 430 universities providing diploma or undergraduate social work programs and 150 universities providing a Master of Social Work course (Höjer et al., 2022).

The expansion of social work education to meet the needs of the growing social services workforce in many countries in the region is, from one perspective, a positive development, but not without challenges. A key tension is whether there are enough social work courses to meet the demand for graduates and if, further, within the university courses providing social work training, there are enough qualified social work educators to teach social work. Many newly established social work courses are staffed by non-social work-qualified academics until local social work academic capacity is developed (Shek et al., 2017). Further, in countries where social work is not well developed, new social work courses are sometimes established and operate without national guidelines or standards. The quality of courses is not always ideal (UNICEF, 2018). The recently updated *Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training* (IASSW/IFSW, 2020) provide important guidance for social work course standards in the absence of national frameworks. Still, resourcing courses to the required level in some countries can be difficult. Finally, the often rapid development of social work education in the region has meant that the textbooks used and the models taught are heavily influenced by Western social work perspectives. There is a compelling need to indigenize or decolonize the social

work curriculum and develop local models of social work practice and research to be taught in universities (Das et al., 2022).

13.4 Social Work Practice Education

As an essential element of social work education, social work practice education is consistently a part of most social work courses in the region although it has been argued that the quality of practice education placements is sometimes highly variable due to a range of reasons, including poorly developed social services sectors to provide placements (UNICEF, 2018; UNICEF/GSSWA, 2019). The COVID pandemic presented a complex environment for social work practice education, which will be explored further in this chapter; however, prior to the pandemic social work practice education also faced several challenges. For example, in countries such as Australia, with a long-established history of social work education and a national standards framework specifying minimum hours for student placements, it has been argued that long social work practice education placements during social work courses impact student wellbeing. Research in Australia has found pressure on education providers to source long social work practice education placements in the health and social services sector is increasing while social work students report substantial impacts of long unpaid placements on their finances, mental wellbeing and capacity to have part-time work to fund their courses (Hodge et al., 2021; Morley et al., 2023).

From another perspective, in countries where social work and social work education are in an earlier stage of development, social work practice education is similarly seen as a critical though frequently challenging element of social work education. For example, in the context of China's rapid social work development, it is argued that a key challenge has been the capacity of the social services sector, also in its early stages of development, to provide adequate placements for social work students to acquire necessary practice skills and a social work identity (Höjer et al., 2022). Similar observations have been made about Vietnam where there has also been a recent expansion in social work education and government support for the expansion of the social services workforce. While Vietnam's universities are developing formal social work courses, often in international collaborations with well-established social work education providers in other countries, key challenges remain in developing partnerships with the social services sector to provide placements and finding workers within the sector who have the qualifications and experience necessary to provide supervision to social work students on placement (Nguyen et al., 2022). A key conclusion of a multi-country review of social work practice and education in several East Asia and Pacific countries was that challenges in accessing quality social work practice education placements were frequently the major impediment to the provision of quality social work education. However, it was noted this improved in countries as their social services sector became more developed over time (UNICEF/GSSWA, 2019).

13.5 Country Examples of Social Work Practice Education During the Pandemic

The preceding discussion in this chapter has briefly outlined the development and status of social work practice and education in the Asia Pacific region. As has been noted, a critical but often challenging element of social work education is the provision of social work practice education, and further complexities in the provision of social work practice education were presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the next section of the chapter, the experience of providing social work practice education during the pandemic is provided from the perspective of three countries in Asia Pacific: Australia, the Philippines and Malaysia.

13.5.1 Australia

In Australia entry to practice Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) courses are accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) through the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS) (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2021). The ASWEAS provides the requirements for field education practice placements. Students undertake 1000 h of professional practice learning across 2–3 placements during either their 4-year BSW or 2-year postgraduate MSW course. At least 500 h of the placements must be undertaken in Australia and at least 500 h must involve a direct practice role using interpersonal skills. Students are not able to undertake a placement in an agency context where they are currently employed.

Since the commencement of the pandemic in 2020, several Australian states have had extended periods of lockdown, with only essential workers allowed to work away from home, and schools and universities were closed for on-campus study. The impact on the provision of practice education placements was substantial from the universities' ability to source and support placements and from the perspective of community organizations providing placement opportunities.

In 2020, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) agreed to temporary modifications to the ASWEAS requirements for practice education to assist universities in arranging placements in response to the substantial challenges for practice education presented by the pandemic. These modifications included an overall recognition that students' learning and wellbeing needed to take precedence; the total placement hours required was reduced by 20% (to 800 h); students were able to undertake all their placement hours in non-direct practice contexts if no direct practice placements were available (i.e. Undertaking a research or service development project); students were able to undertake placements in agency contexts where they were also employed so long as there was a different focus for the student role; "non-traditional" placement options were permissible such as undertaking a placement across multiple settings (i.e. Placements across multiple

organizations with an external social work supervisor and undertaking placements as part of the "surge" workforce to support people with COVID in quarantine); students were able to undertake placements remotely working from home; and, that universities were able to deliver up to 20 h of placements through simulation where needed to meet gaps in student learning on pandemic affected placements.

In addition to the modification of the standards for practice education, universities directly utilized a range of strategies to maintain their placement programs during the pandemic. These included:

- "Virtual placements" whereby students completed the whole placement remotely from home with a community agency.
- Fully online placements with rural, remote and international placement agencies that may have previously been difficult to access as an in-person placement, such as an Australian student undertaking a placement with a social work service in India.
- Placements with the university rather than a community social work organization to undertake either a project or research and access to simulation activities for developing direct practice skills such as communication.
- Research or project placements with community social work agencies that could be completed remotely with the support of academics from the university for research advice.
- Placements with the "surge" workforce established to support the pandemic response such as health and wellbeing checks for people living in quarantine isolation following international travel.
- Extensive re-scheduling of teaching subject delivery to allow students to study coursework from home online during the most restrictive lockdown periods when many community agencies were unable to operate and placements were not possible.
- Practice education administration and support moved online for activities such as liaison between universities and placement providers for student assessment and support.

Post-pandemic, the challenges for practice education continue, as do some of the innovations. While lockdowns have finished, the long-term impact on the health and community services workforces where many social work placements take place has continued. Worker burnout in combination with a highly mobile workforce and high vacancy rates mean it is a challenging environment for the provision of placements, with many organizations finding it difficult to commit to providing placements for students. The ASWEAS standards, which provide the requirements for placements in the Australian context, have reverted to the pre-pandemic structure, meaning a higher standard is required in a complex operating environment for placements.

However, much has been learnt from the provision of practice education placements during the pandemic, and some innovations continue to be adopted in the ongoing provision of placements in Australia. For example, flexible delivery of placements through mixed on-site and online delivery means placements can be conducted in new areas regionally or even internationally. The pandemic period also

demonstrated the potential of a range of university-community organization partnerships to provide placements, which can be a mix of direct practice, research, or service development projects. A range of efficiencies around online administrative support for placements also continue to provide benefits for the provision of practice education.

13.5.2 Philippines

The practice of social work in the Philippines is regulated by the Republic Act 4373, popularly known as *"An Act to Regulate the Practice of Social Work and the Operation of Social Work Agencies in the Philippines and for Other Purposes,"* which was enacted into law on June 19, 1965. Subsequently, on August 4, 1967, this was amended by RA 5175 to pave the way for the professionalization of social work practice in the Philippines. There is a requirement of a minimum of 1000 supervised fieldwork hours for intervention with individuals and families, working with groups and communities, and passing the licensure examination conducted by the Philippine Regulation Commission Social Work Board of Examiners.

The COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 created challenging realities specifically for the social work field instruction programs. The second semester often begins in January or February of each year, and since the pandemic in the Philippines began its uncertainties in March 2020, most of the school administration, students, teachers, and parents were caught unaware and had to look at alternative ways to achieve the learning outcomes despite the pandemic. Methods of intervention were previously taught on the premise of a face-to-face engagement between the client and social workers. The need for actual field practice to ensure the holistic learning development of social work students was at stake. The whole of the country was under lockdown, and only online platforms for course delivery were viable, but there was a struggle because of the slow connectivity of the internet providers.

To respond to the challenges for practice education brought forth by the Pandemic in 2020, the National Association for Social Work Education Inc. provided support to the member schools in the form of various webinars and online training to allow the shifting of teaching modalities from a face-to-face manner to online platforms. Each school and university examined their previous practices and what now presented as challenges in the context of the pandemic. Modifications and adjustments in terms of student attendance were required as teaching moved online, and many students had poor and often no internet connectivity, aggravated by a lack of suitable technology. Much of the concern also revolved around the reality that not all houses were conducive for simultaneous online classes, especially if there were 3–4 students in the household. However, since the practical placement time was stipulated by law RA 4373, the hours of fulfillment remained the same. During the second semester, most of the placements were working with the community and, therefore, presented a challenge in the context of the pandemic. This was where the

creativity and flexibility of social work agencies and school supervisors were highlighted as agreement to conduct online placements became a possibility.

Among the modifications to the modalities of the social work practice program, universities and colleges employed various strategies for their placement programs during the pandemic. Some of these, which are quite similar to the responses of other countries, are as follows:

- "Online placements" in which students work from home but can access the placement site utilizing the online platforms to connect with the agencies and community members.
- Creation of field placements for social work students within the universities through conducting community extension or volunteer work providing mental health services.
- Communication through SMS and phone calls between students and clients, to some degree, provided adequate connection; however, disparities between placement providers' digital access and funding were a challenge, especially for the rural placements.
- A humanitarian consideration was not to include attendance as part of the grading system in recognition of the challenges of access to no or limited digital resources, unstable internet connection, and extra financial resources needed to pay for the internet connections.
- Extensive academic policy review and temporary changes to adopt a no-fail policy and instead leave the unaccomplished grade if requirements were not fulfilled to a blank grade with the indication that the reason is due to the COVID pandemic.
- Prerequisite subject requirements were relaxed to accommodate more flexibility in subject enrolment and the removal of the minimum number of subject loads.
- Mental health support was provided through various webinars and other activities to support students, faculty members, and personnel to help cope with the immediate and long-term impact of COVID-19 on one's social functioning.
- Educational advising, guidance, and administration shifted to online platforms, thus developing programs that would provide flexible assistance.
- Utilization of international and local webinars as supplemental and alternative classes taking into account the global context of analysis of the person in the environment.

Though we are now in the post-pandemic stage, the impact of it continues to be felt. Prolonged isolation brought forth by the pandemic has created a vacuum of distance between young people, their peers, and their family members. Students' mental health has now become a priority and is a priority area for support by colleges and universities in academic settings. Currently, lessons learned from the pandemic include the identification of various networks and modalities that can eventually contribute to the improvement of social work curricula in the future. Expansion of partner agencies and communities can go beyond national barriers as evidenced by the numerous international webinars that served as either additional or alternative classes during the pandemic and has provided the foundation for taking

a more international focus to the development and delivery of curriculum and international placements.

13.5.3 Malaysia

The Bachelor and Master of Social Work courses in Malaysia are considered groundbreaking in the Malaysian context and designed to be both generic and comprehensive courses preparing social work graduates. These courses, which span 4 years at most universities, have been established to address the nation's requirement for a larger number of competent social workers who can effectively deliver social work services across various welfare sectors and contribute to social development in Malaysia. The courses mostly equip the students with a fundamental knowledge base, underlying principles, and practical skills necessary for ethical and responsible engagement in social work. They also provide students with hands-on training opportunities within social work agencies through a series of practicum sessions emphasizing the practical aspect of the social work profession. As social work graduates, they are expected to apply the knowledge, techniques, values, ethics, and skills they have acquired during their studies and practicum series to become competent professional social workers in the field of social work.

As an example of how a typical university providing social work education in Malaysia responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience of the Social Work Section at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) will be examined. The USM School of Social Sciences is one of the oldest social sciences schools in Malaysia, and it was established in 1970. It provides a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs to around 1500 students, including a Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work. USM embraces field education in its social work courses as the signature pedagogy of the profession. This competency-based education is critical to the successful development of the social work student. The field curriculum supports the mission and goals of the program and the values of the social work profession, including social and economic justice and respect for diversity. The field education practicum is structured as a continuum of learning from university-based coursework and allows students to gain experience in a social work setting. Students receive regular professional supervision and engage in a dynamic process toward development as beginning professional generalist practitioners.

However, during the pandemic, the hybrid practicum took the place of the traditional in-person practicum model at USM. The hybrid practicum series refers to a sequence of practicum experiences that combine both traditional in-person placements and online components. One of the main goals of having a hybrid practicum is to keep providing quality education from a generalist practice perspective online. To ensure students gain the essential knowledge, skills, and values needed to start their practicum work, the hybrid fieldwork component must be satisfactorily completed. Through these hybrid experiences, students were expected to integrate knowledge obtained from courses in methods of social work practice, human

behavior in the social environment, social policy, and social research. Participation in the hybrid practicum further promoted personal commitment to and socialization in the social work profession.

This series provided the students with a comprehensive and well-rounded learning experience, allowing them to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings while leveraging virtual and digital platforms for learning and supervision. The hybrid nature of the practicum series enhanced flexibility and accessibility while maintaining the integrity of the practicum series required for students' professional development.

During the hybrid practicum series, students were required to attend online practicum seminars once every 3 weeks. Attendance at these online practicum seminars was mandatory. This practicum seminar was coordinated by the Practicum Coordinator and was open to agency and USM supervisors. The aims were to help students understand the relationship between issues in practice and theory, to provide opportunities for students to share experiences and exchange opinions with others, and to provide equal opportunity to discuss any difficulties with "the new" hybrid practicum model.

Post-pandemic elements of the hybrid placement model have continued. Students are enrolled in and attend a physical field seminar while having online seminars as part of a hybrid practicum series. This physical field seminar allows students to engage in more in-depth discussion and analysis of issues related to their application of practice models. Meeting with students from other field instruction settings allows students to broaden their perspectives on social work practice. It helps them to understand more about the commonalities of social work practice in different settings. Moreover, the field seminar experience is a collaborative undertaking between the universities and various community social service agencies, organizations, schools, and institutions. In this, the students actively participate in the collaborative process for field work practicum.

13.6 Key Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-pandemic Context

Social work practice education continues to be a critical element of social work education in the Asia Pacific. As has been noted in this chapter, even prior to the pandemic social work practice education involved complexities, whether due to difficulties in securing placement opportunities in developing social services sectors or related to students' wellbeing and the substantial impacts workplace-based placements place on students' personal lives and ability to earn an income. The pandemic presented further challenges for social work practice education and social work education in general.

The three examples from Australia, the Philippines and Malaysia demonstrate how social work educators and the social services sector responded to providing social work practice education in different country contexts. While these examples

are only three from a large and diverse region, it is the authors' experience that mirrors the experience of many other countries during the pandemic. What is also apparent is that despite the varying cultural contexts and stages of development of social work education and practice in the different countries, there are many commonalities in the experiences of social work practice education during and post-pandemic. During the pandemic, the three countries experienced substantial community lockdowns, and there was a rapid move to provide social work practice education in an online and remote format. There was some relaxation of social work practice education requirements due to the impact of the pandemic on faculty, students and the social services sector who provide placements. As can be seen from the examples, and what can be observed more broadly, most countries have returned to pre-pandemic requirements and practices for social work practice education, but there has also been continued adoption of new ways of working and new flexibilities and ways of providing the placement experience to students. At the same time, some of the key challenges for social work practice education placements continue. This includes maintaining a focus on student wellbeing and how the social services sector and other sectors providing social work placements can be resourced and supported to fulfill this role.

In the Asia Pacific region, further development of social work practice education in the post-pandemic period is taking place in a broader context of general challenges and opportunities for social work education. There is a growing demand for qualified social workers in many countries across the region, and governments are implementing initiatives to expand the social services workforce. Linked to this is the view that many social development challenges that impact across national borders and a region, such as climate change and disasters, need a well-resourced social services sector led by well-qualified social workers. Social work education will play a key role in developing the social work profession to meet these workforce and social development demands. At the same time, the challenges for social work practice education will continue in many countries as they did prior to the pandemic, where the growth in students in social work courses exceeds the level of available quality placements in the social services in the community.

There are also a range of challenges facing social work education in the region, which will need to be creatively addressed as social work education and practice continues to develop across the Asia Pacific. These include:

- Taking forward the learnings from delivering social work education during the pandemic.
- Exploring alternative ways of developing practice skills such as simulation to complement the signature pedagogy of social work practice placements.
- Decolonizing and localizing the social work curriculum.
- Meeting the demands for an expanded social work workforce in an increasingly diversified social service sector.
- Securing and resourcing the social work academic workforce to staff expanding university social work programs.
- Developing the research-teaching interface in social work education and practice and increasing the evidence base for Asia Pacific social work approaches.

13.7 Conclusion

Social work education and practice have a relatively long history in many countries in the Asia Pacific region, but there is now considerable diversity in how they are structured and the stage of development. Social work education, and the critical element of social work practice education, will continue to play a key role in responding to the increasing needs of the government to develop a more professionalized social work workforce and the research base to address the complex social development issues in the region including achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Given the diversity of cultural contexts across the Asia Pacific region and the varied stages of social work education and practice development, it is striking that there are many commonalities in the experiences of social work practice education provision both during the pandemic and now in the post-pandemic phase. During the pandemic, placements were mostly provided online with community organizations or as research/project placements through universities. Alternative placement models were utilized, and various flexible arrangements were adopted to enable students to achieve the learning outcomes. While post-pandemic some of the flexibilities in standards and guidelines for placements have returned to pre-pandemic requirements, in many countries some of the learnings and developments in social work practice education during the pandemic have continued. This includes placement provision in fully online or hybrid models, online placements in rural or international locations, more varied placements including research and program development projects and more efficient administration processes for universities and community organizations. Social work practice education continues to be a critical, albeit challenging, aspect of social work education, but the learnings from the provision of placements during the COVID pandemic will continue to provide the foundation for more diverse and robust models of social work practice education into the future.

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Chapter 14
Social Work Practice Education in South Africa: Recent History, Current Approaches

Varoshini Nadesan

14.1 Introduction

South Africa (hereafter SA), situated at the southernmost tip of Africa, has a strong legacy of colonialism and segregation practices. The root of social work in South Africa is embedded in welfare practices that served the interests of dominant groups that were segregated along racial lines. The allocation of welfare services was aligned with a system of indoctrinated apartheid. Social work was thus practiced along the designates of the apartheid system (ASASWEI/AASWA, 2017). The realization of democracy in South Africa in 1994 saw the birth of a new Constitution (RSA, 1996), instilling principles of fairness and uniformity in the land. Subsequently, the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) strengthened the doctrine of equity and non-discrimination in the allocation of South African resources and welfare services.

14.2 Overview of the Development of Social Work Education in South Africa

Like other African countries, social work education in South Africa was not immune to the influence of Western theories and ideologies of countries like Britain and the United States (Harms-Smith, 2023; Smith, 2008). South Africa was the first country in Africa to have formal education and training in social work, pioneered by two

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academic institutions in the early 1920s, at a time when South African education had not yet called for trained personnel to work in the field of social welfare (Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004). The introduction of a diploma course in social work in 1924 was followed by a degree course in 1932 (McKendrick, 1987; Ramanathan & Link, 1999). Social work education in SA was endorsed as a social science-based generic three-year university qualification at a National Conference on Social Work in 1936 (McKendrick, 1998; Studies, 1954).

The subsequent development of social work as a profession, including members of all races being educated and trained in South Africa, is well documented. McKendrick (1998) as well as Rautenbach and Chiba (2010) argue that despite separate education and the promulgation of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, social work education continued to thrive in South Africa. However, it was only in 2002 that national standards for social work education, together with a statutorily endorsed accreditation system, were developed (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004).

Post-apartheid social work education in South Africa saw the accreditation and implementation of a four-year qualification, namely the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work degree, supplanted by the Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW), registered on the National Qualifications Framework in 2003. Since 2007, all social work education providers offered a four-year undergraduate degree (Simpson & Raniga, 2014). Today, 19 institutions of higher education offer BSW qualifications across South Africa. Social work education in South Africa incorporates a fundamental list of theoretical courses with a compulsory and integrated field instruction process. This is often seen as work-integrated learning (WIL), a concept supported in the South African higher education landscape (CHE, 2011).

Professional associations for social work in academia exist. The Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI), formerly known as the Joint Universities Committee (JUC), features prominently amongst academics.

14.3 Critical Factors in Social Work Education in South Africa

Various factors influence social work education in South Africa. Moving from a system of apartheid to a democratic system of education involved a strategy transition. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted teaching and learning, especially field instruction training.

14.3.1 Understanding the BSW Entrant

South African students mostly enter tertiary studies straight out of high school, having met the basic entrance requirement to study for a degree course and, over recent times, have most likely obtained a state bursary to study in this field.

The demand for the BSW increased from a net enrolment of 1566 in 2000 to 7250 in 2007 and 17,528 in 2011 (CHE, 2018, p. 55). This steady increase over the years coincided with the financial support and bursaries offered to potential students to study social work by the state department responsible for social services (CHE, 2018; DSD, 2013). However, it is also vital that universities implement selection and screening procedures for students entering the respective BSW programs (Schmidt & Rautenbach, 2016) to assess their motivations for entering this field of study. One concern amongst academia is the psychosocial vulnerability among social work students, which impacts their well-being and academic performance. A study of social work students at a university in Johannesburg in 2016 found that those who registered for the degree in social work were from diverse backgrounds and encountered challenging life experiences. This arguably contributed to students being psychosocially helpless, which in turn affected their academic performance and progress (Van Breda, 2017). This study is relative to an earlier study on student vulnerability concerning social work students at the same university in Johannesburg, wherein 77 percent of students had experienced the loss of a parent or significant other, and more than half grew up in poverty (Van Breda, 2011). Similar findings were obtained in other studies, such as the effects of trauma on the professional self of fourth-year social work students at a distance learning university in South Africa (Wade, 2009) and a study by Dykes and Green (2015) on the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of social work students. These studies present a grim view of the learning profile of students studying social work, requiring them to recognize their weaknesses before helping others (Kane, Lear & Dube, 2014; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). Thus, it is imperative that we understand the profile of BSW students in South Africa as they enter the demanding field of studying social work and will be required to undertake field practice education amongst equally susceptible communities.

14.3.2 The African World View and the Social Work Curriculum

It is important to understand the African worldview as the basis for practice in the helping professions to make the social work curriculum content relevant to South Africa. South African academics Thabede (2008), Mupedziswa (1997), Kaseke (1986) and Ross and Mathebane (2023) argue that social work students should be knowledgeable about various traditions and beliefs, like the belief in ancestors,

traditional healing, and the rites of passage within indigenous communities. This understanding would ensure that field placements are meaningful and relevant to the community's expectations of social workers. Thus, it is critical to include in training the relevance of language and cultural practices (Kreitzer, 2012; Makhubele & Qalinge, 2009).

14.3.3 Incorporating Field Instruction into the Curriculum

Field instruction in social work education is a specialized, curriculated means of developing and translating theoretical knowledge into practice. Field instruction forms part of the higher education strategy on work-integrated learning (CHE, 2015) and is a mandatory component of the undergraduate degree in social work in South Africa. The Qualification Standard for the BSW (CHE, 2015, p. 14) uses the term field practice education and sees the training of social work students as a means to "make discernible impacts on the persons/communities that they [students] engage with." It is also argued that field instruction allows students to demonstrate the ability to link praxis with understanding and challenging hegemonic histories and discourses (CHE, 2015). Within the BSW, students undertake a structured field instruction module primarily over each of the second, third and fourth years of study. This is because students are permitted to work with service users only once registered as student social workers with the SACSSP in their second year of study (SACSSP, 2011).

14.3.4 Field Instruction Placement

Field instruction placement, sometimes known as practice learning opportunity or agency placement, allows social work students to demonstrate academic learning in practice. Field instruction placements in South Africa may include student assignments to human service organizations such as child and family welfare agencies, child and youth care facilities, health care facilities like primary health care clinics, oncology and geriatric care, educational facilities like primary or secondary schools and correctional facilities such as reform schools and prisons. Field instruction placements occur within a specified model and duration, depending on the year or level of study, the university program, and statutory or professional requirements.

The South African landscape has a wide network of human service agencies with a vast and complex range of programs that provide social work services and benefits. This occurs at governmental and non-governmental levels. The non-governmental sector comprises the local child and family welfare societies, family and marital services, organizations that may deal with alcohol and substance dependency, crime prevention and rehabilitation and private medical facilities. In addition

to social work services at the state Department of Welfare and non-governmental organizations, social work services are also offered at state departments like public hospitals, correctional services, the justice department—at magisterial, regional and high courts—and at the offices of the Family Advocate in terms of the custody of minor children (DSD, 2007, 2016). Due to some organizations' inability to recover from the financial burden of the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of such placements is limited.

14.3.5 Field Instruction Partnerships and Relationships

One of the success factors in any field instruction program is the collaborative working arrangement amongst the personnel working in the interest of the student learner. The CHE argues that professional partners, both internal and external to the university, are committed to providing developmental workplace opportunities for the student (CHE, 2011).

The field instruction partnership in Fig. 14.1 depicts the relationships between various role players. The various education partnerships and relationships, as seen in the field instruction training in social work education, are divided into two sections: the university-student-agency-supervisor team, which is usually the first step of the field instruction program, followed by the agency-student-service-user relationship. However, the nature of the partnerships and field instruction relationships is contextual and dependent on various situational factors at field instruction sites (Nadesan, 2019).

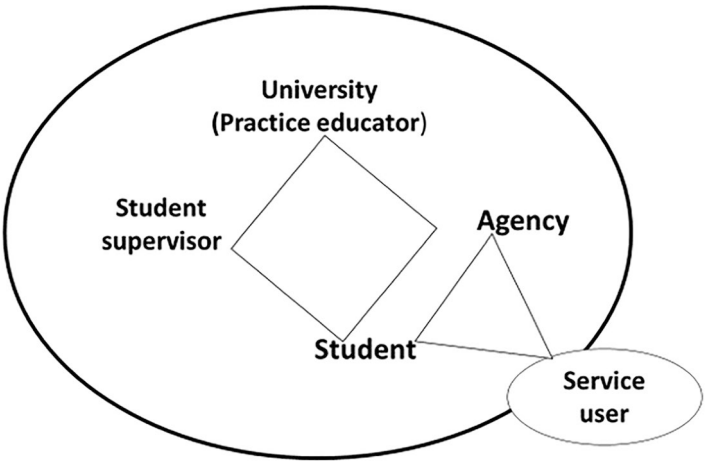

Fig. 14.1 The field instruction partnership and relationship. (Nadesan, 2019)

14.3.6 Registration and Ethics

In SA, a student may only enter the field instruction placement if registered with the statutory body, namely the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), a process that is generally completed at the beginning of the second year of the BSW degree (SACSSP, 2006, 2011) and indeed before a student starts with the field instruction practice. The university is tasked with gatekeeping this regulation by ensuring that students are informed timeously and that the regulation is enforced (Nadesan, 2020). A student social worker may not function without the supervision of a social worker (SACSSP, 2006, Section 5.4.1.f., 1954).

The protection of the rights of service users, and indeed the profession of social work itself, has been the focus of various statutory bodies like the SACSSP (SACSSP, 2006). This implies that various issues relating to ethics and the protection of confidential information need to be considered. To this end, the student, supervisor, and practice lecturer are governed by an ethical code (SACSSP, 2006) that is enforced by the SACSSP. Issues of divulgence of confidential information regarding service users, negligence and unprofessional behavior are governed by various sections of the Rules relating to acts or omissions of a social worker that would constitute unprofessional conduct. These efforts to protect the service user are paramount in professional practice, and it is the duty of all involved in the field instruction system to uphold the values enshrined in the ethical code.

The SACSSP, as the statutory body governing student social workers in South Africa, determines the rules and policies relating to its registrants' professional and unprofessional behavior. The Rules relating to acts or omissions of a social worker, student social worker or social auxiliary worker (DSD, 1993) provide a guide on handling confidential information of service users (Sect. 14.4). Incidentally, the SACSSP played an invaluable role during the COVID-19 pandemic in advising and supporting academic departments in dealing with related issues.

14.3.7 Models of Field Instruction

There are three primary models of field instruction amongst the 19 universities offering the BSW, ranging from a block, concurrent, or rotational model. This process was static until interrupted by the pandemic, when universities had to creatively incorporate a mixture of concurrent and block placements as well as simulated activities to provide students with field practice knowledge. International placements are not a common practice among South African universities and students, as each student must register with the SACSSP before commencing with field instruction.

14.3.8 The Assessment Process

Until 2015, assessing students in the BSW was guided by a set of 27 exit-level outcomes (ELOs). Students were required to demonstrate competency based on a range of requisite statements and associated assessment criteria on the ELOs (CHE, 2018; Hochfeld, 2010). This changed in 2013 when the CHE Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education realigned its requirements for qualifications along the continuum of the NQF's levels and domains (CHE, 2015). Ironically, the transformed CHE standards were only communicated to the academic sector in 2016, resulting in a delay in implementation. The new qualifications standards for the BSW degree include a focus on core social work knowledge like welfare policies, the developmental welfare paradigm, relevant theories, perspectives and models, and applying knowledge and skills in nine core areas. These core areas include professional identity, application of core values and principles, holistic assessment and intervention, ethical competence, working with diverse communities and cultures, application of knowledge, theories and skills, effective communication of professional knowledge and research, and a sound knowledge of relevant policies and legislation applicable to social work practice (CHE, 2015, pp. 9–12).

The assessment techniques, practices and processes were impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown. Universities had to strategize creatively to undertake assessments without compromising standards and values. At times, students were assessed via simulated activities, as any contact with clients or service users was prohibited.

14.4 The Effects of the Pandemic on Social Work Teaching and Learning

Knowledge of the context of the South African political landscape will provide readers with an understanding of the segregation system of apartheid. The apartheid era created economic gaps and a vast number of inequalities. Populations were forcibly moved to rural areas, where access to various resources and services was lacking. The period post 1994—when South Africa's first democratic election was held—was marked by changes. The strategy of the government in power was to level the playing fields so that all citizens could access resources and services. However, political will and greed prevailed, and services were not as forthcoming to its people as envisaged.

At the end of March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, life as we knew it was brought to a dramatic and sudden halt. Of relevance, when universities closed, students were forced out of university residences and had to travel home at their own cost. Students who lived below the breadline were unable to meet that cost, thus adding to their concerns for survival. Social work educators were flummoxed as there was a curriculum to complete and limited or no contact with students (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Access to students' personal information, such as their

contact cell phone numbers, was hindered by legislation (the Protection of Personal Information Act), which prohibited such disclosure by the university. As university lecturers, we were in a conundrum as we could not reach most students. We immediately implemented a group communication strategy through social media platforms such as WhatsApp. We used the snowball technique to locate our students. However, many students did not have smart devices to access WhatsApp. The challenge was that, as many students' homes of origin were in deep rural areas and they were forced to return to these remote areas, they did not have access to the internet to contact lecturers or peers. Field instruction coordinators and program managers were unable to provide meaningful direction to students and placement agencies. One of the most crucial effects of the pandemic was that non-governmental agencies had to close their doors to the public, thus affecting student placements at these facilities. Some of these organizations have not reopened post-pandemic, this time due to funding issues. The situation became tenuous, and the field placement partnerships were crumbling.

Co-incidentally, at the time of the pandemic, the author was the President of ASASWEI (2019–2021), representing and leading 18 universities in South Africa on the academic front (https://www.asaswei.org.za/). This was a crucial time in academia and an immediate response was required to guide program managers and leaders. Social work academics in South Africa, grouped under the banner of our professional association (ASASWEI), met frequently to consolidate our efforts to understand our new normal and find new ways of advancing the social work curriculum. Online communication, a rarely used platform, became the only form of communication. It was also essential to link with social work stakeholders (such as the SACSSP and CHE) and other social work roleplayers (supervisors, placement agencies and government departments) to develop a shared vision to take the process forward during the lockdown, which existed for over 12 months.

There was a determined drive to make universities more student-focused. Online tuition became the norm. South African universities partnered with service providers to provide students with laptops and other smart devices so that work could continue from home. Free access to internet data, which was provided by many network providers, helped students establish contact with the outside world, including their lecturers and peers. During the transition, I became deeply concerned about the psychological state of my own students, as I could not reach them. I managed to access their cellphone numbers in a call-out via the class representatives and then painstakingly loaded data and airtime out of my own pocket to each of my 320 students' cellphones so that we could maintain contact and have lectures. This helped to ease the economic burden on the students, as well as assured them of lecturer support during this trying period.

Together with our university leaders, a decision was taken to extend the academic year by a month or two. This gave social work students the opportunity to complete their academic year requirements and universities to provide alternate field instruction methods. Field instruction moved to the online platform with online counseling and a strengthened increase in simulated learning.

However, collectively, we encountered many challenges with the new situation that we were in. Assessments were affected as it was difficult to assess students using online technologies. More importantly, especially within the South African context, students did not have access to the internet or even smart technology that was linked to the Internet. Some rural areas of South Africa do not have access to electricity; thus, electronic devices that require electricity are somewhat superfluous. This resulted in many students falling out of the program despite concerted efforts by lecturers to reach out to their students.

Another point to consider post-COVID-19 is that university-based education alone is insufficient for social work students to gain practical training. Accordingly, a typical curriculum in social work has always comprised academic teaching as well as a structured practice component across the 4 years of study. This aspect was severely compromised during the COVID-19 lockdown. Universities were compelled to revisit their year planner and extend the academic year for those yet to meet the academic requirements. In practice, this meant that those universities that taught the BSW had to reconsider the type of placement. As it was possible in some instances to complete the theory modules online, completing the fieldwork practice modules was more complex. Those universities that used the concurrent module converted to a block placement model so that students could go back into the field when it was deemed safe to do so. This meant extending the academic year by 1–6 months in some instances; however, it was necessary so that the quality of the training was not compromised. Some universities opted to have more online simulated practices so that students could at least benefit from simulated field practice. This was not as effective as it sounds, as many students lacked the required smart devices and internet connectivity for such laboratory sessions. This situation was not unique to any particular university, and the initiatives and responses of all 19 BSW programs meant that each program manager was alert to the challenges and made meaningful endeavors to ensure student throughput without compromising program quality. However, this also meant that students may have graduated later than intended.

14.5 The Situation Currently

One of the unintended offshoots of the pandemic was a project developed by the SACSSP to prepare graduates for the workplace. This project was initiated to assist graduates in seamlessly transitioning into the workplace upon graduation, and it would also simultaneously supplement the training of graduates affected during the lockdown. Importantly, the National Department of Social Development also took the initiative to develop an internship program where students are now absorbed into an internship after graduation. This internship allowed students to receive a stipend, while practicing basic social work methodologies during a 6–12 month placement.

We are faced with a surplus of trained social work graduates in South Africa. This is despite the Policy for Social Service Practitioners (DSD, 2017, p. 84) identifying social work graduates to "respond to human resources shortages identified across the social services sector (in particular) in rural communities and poor communities."

We need to accept that there is a need to revisit the social work curriculum to respond sufficiently to the impact of post-pandemic life on communities. Cognizance must be taken of the impact of the lockdown on social contact and feelings of loneliness and isolation. The CHE recognized the call for a decolonized curriculum as "fundamental to informing understandings of quality in higher education and to guiding action in this regard" and raised questions relating to the content of the curricula and what needed to be changed (CHE, 2017, p. 1). With more profound debates continuing on many levels on the issue of decolonizing the curricula, the impact will be felt on the field instruction curriculum.

Currently, reliable and valid indicators to determine selection criteria for prospective social work students appear to be under consideration at South African universities. This is in response to a 2013 CHE audit of social work academic programs that universities are to consider selection criteria for new students into the profession (CHE, 2006, 2018). Arguably, the admission requirements lie within the ambit and jurisdiction of the university. Subsequently, there appears to be a fervent discussion amongst South African academics on selection criteria for prospective students (ASASWEI/AASWA, 2017). These deliberations are in their early stages but are aligned with recommendations and concerns by the CHE regarding student recruitment, selection processes and student throughput.

14.6 Conclusion

South African education is based on the apartheid system of government, which has undergone a major overhaul since the dawn of democracy in 1994. The Bachelor of Social Work is the only accepted program for students entering the field. This means that all students must complete a four-year undergraduate degree to register with the SACSSP as a social worker before entering social work practice. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted many students who were in the midst of a four-year degree. Some had to abandon their studies either due to economic distress or the inability to cope with the changes. This was noticeably so amongst senior social work students. Having successfully traversed the previous 3 years of the BSW, students in the fourth year of study faced an intense workload of theory and field instruction where the emphasis was on readiness for practice. However, for some, the inability to complete their theory and practice modules on time resulted in gap years and dropouts. Admittedly, we were unable to reach all students during the pandemic, but it was not for a lack of concerted and determined effort to try.

Many universities in South Africa have now weighed their options of going hybrid or incorporating opportunities for online lectures. However, all other

universities offer residential teaching except for one distance-education university in the country. However, the latter group has taken into consideration the plight of their students and the convenience of transitioning to online teaching; as a result, they have incorporated online lectures into their academic programs. On a personal note, in consideration of the online opportunities for training, perhaps it is time that social work educators revisit the field training teaching methods in line with global and contemporary trends.

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Chapter 15
The Current and Future Challenges of Social Work Practice Education: A Summarizing View Within a Global Approach

Annamaria Campanini, Riccardo Guidi, and Christian Spatscheck

15.1 Introduction

After having analyzed different innovative experiences of social work practice education during the pandemic and explored their current value, this chapter tries to compare and interpret the evidence in the light of the most relevant international guidelines on social work education, the *Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training* (IASSW & IFSW. 2020), hereafter GSs.

Section 15.2 focuses on the GSs, before Sect. 15.3 analyzes the pandemic experimentations in relation to the GSs by first reflecting on how they were coherent with the GSs and then identifying the possible contributions that those experimentations may provide to the future developments of common standards. Section 15.4 outlines some possible conclusions from the synopsis of the findings from the SwooPed project and the GSs.

The article originates from a strong and ongoing collaboration between the authors. However, as some assessment processes require formal attribution, Riccardo Guidi can be considered the author of Sects. 15.1 and 15.4, Annamaria Campanini of Sect. 15.2, and Christian Spatscheck of Sect. 15.3.

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15.2 The Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training

The GSs were jointly designed and adopted by the International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in Adelaide in 2004. Between 2004 and 2019, they served as an aspirational guide for excellence in social work education.

With the adoption of a new "Global Definition of Social Work" in 2014 (IASSW & IFSW, 2014) and the publication of the updated "Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles" in 2018 (IASSW & IFSW, 2018), IASSW and IFSW considered important to update the GSs. After the constitution of a joint task group comprising the IFSW Interim Global Education Commission and IASSW's Global Standards Taskforce. This rigorous consultation lasted over 18 months and included feedback from 125 countries represented by five regional associations, approximately 400 universities and further education organizations, and two international seminars involving service user representatives. The new current GSs were approved by IASSW and IFSW in 2020 (IASSW & IFSW, 2020).

Since the beginning, the GSs have been intended as both a *product* and a *process* (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). In terms of process, they constitute a crucial contribution to and pillar of the slow but clear process towards the *glocalization* of social work (education). The conviction that social work is both embedded within the local context and characterized by common values, principles, and methods at the global level has been at the core of the IASSW's action since its establishment. Alice Salomon (the first president of the IASSW) highlighted many common aspects of social work curricula as well as differences that she ascribed to the different social needs, societies, histories, and educational systems in each country. She warned against eliminating these differences and bringing all schools into line, encouraging each new school to adapt its curriculum to the needs of its own country (Kniephoff-Knebe & Seibel, 2008).

The processual nature and the glocal perspective feed the GSs as a product. In the *Rationale*, the 2020 document fully recognizes the local diversities of social work and endorses its global nature. In the *Preamble*, the current GSs' aims and strategy are stated coherently:

> *…capturing both the universality of social work values and the diversity that characterises the profession through the articulation of a set of standards that are divided between compulsory (those that all programmes must adhere to) and aspirational (those standards that Schools should aspire to include when and where possible). (*IASSW & IFSW, 2020*: 5)*

Compulsory and aspirational standards in social work education refer to three overarching domains that capture the distinct yet intertwined elements of social work education: the *school*, the *people*, and the *profession*.

The *"schools"* of social work are expected to design the programs coherently with the global definition, values, and ethical principles of social work, respect all of the people involved in the programs, design the programs in detail (objectives, outcomes, learning methods, type of final certificate, etc.), in relation to the specific

contexts (needs, regulations, etc.) as well as global factors (professional goals, international trends). The schools are also required to provide resources and facilities for the implementation of social work programs, including a distinct and independent organizational unit, a stable budget, a competent head, staff members with professional autonomy and the opportunity to contribute to the program, and adequate physical infrastructures.

The GSs direct specific attention to the social work programs' curricula designed by the schools. Beyond cross-sectional requirements (e.g., the existence of review procedures, respect of the ethical guidelines), the schools are asked to develop the programs in relation to two interdependent "core curricula" (broad conceptual components): (a) social work in context (knowledge required to critically understand the forces that have shaped social work); and (b) social work in practice (set of skills and knowledge required to design and deliver effective, ethical and competent interventions).

The GSs consider "practice education" as a crucial component of social work programs that "must be sufficient in duration and complexity of tasks and learning opportunities to ensure that students are prepared for professional practice" (IASSW & IFSW, 2020: 13). More specifically, the schools are required to:

(a) Have a detailed and comprehensive practice education manual (placement standards, procedures, assessment criteria, expectations, etc.) made available to students, field placement supervisors and field placement instructors.
(b) Adopt clear and transparent policies and procedures or guidelines for all practice education stages (selection, matching, supervision, etc.)
(c) Collaborate with practice supervisors or instructors who are qualified and experienced.
(d) Provide orientation and ongoing support to practice supervisors.
(e) Ensure adequate and appropriate resources.
(f) Have policies for the inclusion of marginalized populations.
(g) Give students ongoing, timely and developmental feedback.

As an additional recommendation, the GSs ask the schools that practice education to contain at least 25% of the overall education activity.

Educators (i.e., academics, instructors, tutors, lecturers, etc.), students, and service users are considered crucial people in social work education in the GSs. Educators must be adequate in number and expertise, as well as significantly involved in the decision-making processes of the schools/programs. The GSs also require the schools to guarantee the conditions for transparent and equal recruitment and promotion processes and the achievement of programs' objectives. The schools must also guarantee the students that transparency, equality and the conditions to express and develop self-awareness regarding their personal and cultural values, beliefs, traditions and biases are met. Beyond this, service users' rights, views and interests must be incorporated into the curriculum development, implementation and delivery, and their involvement in all aspects of the programs needs to be facilitated.

Finally, the schools must also align their action with the crucial standards of the social work *profession*. This means both respecting and implementing the crucial definitions, values and principles of social work, as internationally stated, as well as collaborating with representatives and key stakeholders of the social work profession.

Since 2004, the GSs have been increasingly accepted and integrated as reference points by the global community of social work education (Barretta-Herman, 2008; Sakaguchi & Sewpaul, 2011; Akintayo et al., 2018; McNabb & Connolly, 2019). The 2020 version has contributed to overcoming some of the most radical criticisms of the 2004 version (Yip, 2004; Gray & Webb, 2008). Although skepticism remains, the GSs aim for sufficient flexibility to be applied in any context, acknowledging the regional and national socio-political, cultural, economic, and historical contexts while complying with global standards.

The IASSW is currently committed to the implementation of the GSs worldwide. Ten lectures focused on several key aspects have been recorded. A taskforce has been created to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the GSs and position them as a key reference for future school curricula updates. Further activities include capacity-building initiatives—from local seminars to conferences and peer reviews on social work education programs—and supportive measures for the development of national and regional standards as well as local knowledge and practice models. Specific attention is paid to the service users' perspective. According to the GSs, schools must incorporate the rights, viewpoints, and interests of service users and broader communities, including in the development, application and delivery of the curricula. To develop this aspect of social work education, the IASSW signed an agreement with the service user involvement group *PowerUs*[1] and organized a series of webinars involving colleagues and experts through experience.

15.3 Lessons from the Pandemic and the Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training

The GSs can be used as a reference for interpreting the pandemic experimentations in social work practice education in two directions: first, to understand whether and how they met the GSs' requirements, and second, to discuss how the outcomes from the experimentations could be used for the further development and implementation of the GSs in the nearer future. Both of these questions will be addressed in the following two sections.

[1] PowerUs (https://powerus.eu) is an international network of teachers and researchers from schools of social work and representatives from different service user organizations. The webinars are available at: https://www.iassw-aiets.org/iassw-power-us-jointr-webinars-2023

15.3.1 In What Way Did the Innovations in Social Work Practice Education Support the GSs?

The policy frameworks for social work practice education significantly vary in the different systems of higher education and social welfare in the countries considered. However, the reflections in the chapters of this book can be summarized insofar as the reactions to the pandemic that were displayed contained both protective and innovative aspects for the establishment of the GSs. The following collection integrates quoted passages from the GSs document (IASSW & IFSW, 2020) that are written in italics.

15.3.1.1 Protective and Conserving Activities to Meet and Keep the Aims of the GSs

During the pandemic's challenges, social work practice education actors maintained and kept up the *consistency, values and policies* of their activities, especially regarding the *support and safeguarding of staff, students and service users*. Beyond this, the pandemic has encouraged the schools to *address local, national and/or regional/international developmental needs and priorities* under the new circumstances. The examples have illustrated how schools managed to sustain an *educational preparation* for *social work practice interventions*, often within the pressures of changing regulations to reach the *different target groups and contexts* under limiting conditions. The *use of social work methods that are based on sound evidence* and the promotion of *dignity and respect* had to be reconsidered regarding their main purposes. At the organizational level, *governance structures, administrative supports, and physical structures* for the delivery of effective social work programs had to be maintained and reshaped in existential ways. This might have also contributed to reflections on the key requirements and most important infrastructures for social work education.

15.3.1.2 Innovative Activities for the Implementation of the GSs

New conditions challenged the actors to *ensure that the next generation of social workers* could gain their right to access *excellent quality learning opportunities,* for which innovative and disruptive solutions had to be found. A lot of innovation was needed to ensure that settings, methods, and forms for the mediation of *social work knowledge deriving from research, experience, policy and practice* could be realized in the learning settings. The *knowledge transfer between different social work schools and between social work education, practice and research* had to be built in new forms. New roles had to be identified, mediated, implemented, and evaluated. Governments and funders had to find new ways to ensure *thriving, well-resourced,*

inclusive and participatory teaching and learning environments through pragmatic solutions, structural changes and reforms at the policy level.

The GSs' criteria for social work practice education had to be reconsidered and redesigned during the pandemic. Key examples are the *selection of practice placement sites*, the placement and *supervision of students*, the *coordination with the program*, the *support* for *students*, the *monitoring* and *evaluation of student performance,* the alignment of different *roles* towards *effective action and collaboration* as well as aspects *of inclusion and feedback culture*. The initiatives and examples of this book show inspiring models for solutions and activities that helped to ensure meeting the GSs in different places during challenging times.

15.3.2 How Can the Innovations of Social Work Practice Education Be Used for a Further Implementation of the GSs?

Many of the examples from the book chapters were inspiring and encouraged us to take a closer look at how the innovations and solutions for the establishment and further development of the GSs could also be transferred into other situations and challenging contexts of the future. Clearly, the GSs do not provide us with simple recipes for such rather complex tasks. However, the document contains several concrete reference points for strategic approaches to this question.

15.3.2.1 Nurturing Valuable Partnerships

The GSs describe the necessary mindset for the extension of their principles. A major approach for social work practice education would be to *nurture valuable partnerships between* the schools, practice institutions and service users *in decision-making regarding practice education*. Some chapters have also shown that special attention should be directed to international placements. If a social work program *engages in international placements, additional standards, guidelines, and support should be provided to* students and practice agencies. Beyond this, social work programs *should have mechanisms to facilitate reciprocity, co-learning, and genuine knowledge exchange* with the partners involved.

15.3.2.2 Incorporate Pandemic-Related Knowledge into the Social Work Programs

The GSs encourage the schools to identify and integrate innovations within their programs. They need to provide *excellent quality learning opportunities that* incorporate *social work knowledge derived from research, experience, policy, and*

practice. The chapters of this book provide many good examples of new potentials. A key approach would be to *nurture a spirit of collaboration and knowledge transfer between* the different actors of *social work education, practice and research*. On the structural side, it would be a key task to *support social work schools in becoming thriving, well-resourced, inclusive, and participatory teaching and learning environments*.

15.3.2.3 A Well-Balanced Use of ICT in Social Work Education

Social work programs should direct their attention to approaches for digitalization within their infrastructure, a task that has also been illustrated in many of this book's chapters. *Irrespective of the mode of teaching (…),* the *provision of adequate infrastructure, including classroom space, computers, texts, audio-visual equipment, community resources for practice education, and on-site instruction and supervision* would need *to facilitate the achievement of its (…) objectives and expected outcomes*. Here, *internet-based education should not fully substitute spaces for face-to-face instruction, practice learning and dialogue. Face-to-face spaces are critical* for *social work education and therefore irreplaceable. In the case of distance, mixed-mode, decentralized and/or internet-based teaching, mechanisms for locally based instruction and supervision should be put in place.*

15.3.2.4 Bridging Between Didactics, Theories, and Values in Social Work Education

The experiences from the pandemic fostered the bridging between didactics, theories and values in social work education. Schools should help social work students develop critical thinking skills and scholarly reasoning attitudes, be open to new experiences and paradigms, and be committed *to lifelong learning.* The settings for learning should be *sufficient in duration and* need to *ensure that students are prepared for professional practice.* They need to be *given sufficient space and time to adhere to the minimum standards.* Teaching activities should *reflect the needs, values and cultures of the relevant populations* and should be *based on human rights principles and the pursuit of justice.*

The actors of social work practice education were brought into critical situations, and they found an impressive variety of solutions. Many schools managed to transform the demands of the GSs into practice very well during challenging times. The newly developed forms and settings for teaching and learning could meet many core ideas of the GSs very well. The pandemic itself served as a new case for a need to develop a c*ritical understanding of how socio-structural inadequacies, discrimination, oppression, and social, political, environmental and economic injustices impact human development.* To reach this aim, new forms of *knowledge of how traditions, culture, beliefs, religions and customs influence human development*

across the lifespan needed to be developed for different settings and new social problems emerging through the pandemic.

The country profiles, the survey data and the presentations and systematic reflections from the different schools and countries within the SwooPed project showed how social work and social work practice education managed *to integrate theory, ethics, research and knowledge development in practice* as well as many creative and innovative examples of the use of *problem-solving and strengths-based approaches*. The activities showed how the *well-being, development and participation of students, staff, practice partners and service users* could be established and gained in challenging situations, but also the limits when even intensive efforts could not always keep up the standards of human rights for all parties involved.

In summary, the redesign of social work practice education during the pandemic can be regarded as a kind of litmus test for the core aims and contents of the GSs. The standards describe visionary aims that have the character of real utopias (Staub-Bernasconi, 2019, 306; Wright, 2010). They describe utopias, and to reach them would be possible. However, a critical mass of actors and supportive institutional and societal structures would need to be aligned for this. To *identify, safeguard, enlarge, and defend professional standards and use human rights and principles, values, and standards of professional ethics* remains an ongoing task for social work and social work practice education. The examples in this book have shown potential and limits in changing times. They encourage members of the social work profession to continue searching for solutions for this ongoing task.

15.4 Lessons Learned in Social Work Education After a Reflection on the Pandemic

The experiences and developments that were analyzed in the previous chapters allow us to focus on possible sustained lessons for social work education in line with the GSs. Although the heterogeneity is unsurprisingly high and every case—at the national or school level—deserves special attention, we can identify the following four crucial and critical themes for the future of social work practice education.

15.4.1 Higher Resilience Within the Global Community of Social Work Practice Education and an Increase in Organizational Collaboration During the Pandemic: But What About the Future?

In an unprecedented scenario, the global community of social work practice education was resilient to a variety of pandemics-related difficulties. Worldwide, schools adjusted their social work practice education activities and developed creative

approaches to provide students with the best possible practice education experiences, albeit with different intensities and modalities. This was often achieved without top-down new regulations about social work practice education and largely by bottom-up initiatives through renewed collaborations among the different actors of the schools (educators, students, etc.) as well as between the schools, social service organizations and the professional actors (supervisors, social work professional organizations). Thus, we can conclude that during the pandemic, collaborative partnership was both confirmed as the crucial organizational infrastructure of social work practice education (Bogo, 2006) and relaunched beyond the routines.

This can be considered a sign of readiness of the social work community and schools' institutional entrepreneurship (Hwang & Powell, 2005). At present, one can wonder whether the collaborative ethos of the pandemic is somehow contributing to solving pre-pandemic institutional and organizational deficits of social work practice education (Ayala et al., 2018; Globerman & Bogo, 2003; Baginsky et al., 2019). In this regard, the move back to "normality" after the pandemic might imply a return to the sedimented structural problems of social work practice education. In the absence of top-down regulations stabilizing at least some key aspects of the relationships between schools, social service organizations and supervisors (e.g., giving the latter some kind of incentive or facilitation to supervise students), the organizational settings of social work practice education will probably remain in critical conditions. After the bottom-up creative approaches that helped to cope with the pandemic difficulties, post-pandemic social work practice education probably requires governments, regulatory bodies and professional organizations to adopt new institutional regulations that facilitate the partnerships.

15.4.2 Post-pandemic Social Work Practice Education: Articulated, Distorted, or Trivialized?

The previous chapters have analyzed the different modalities used by the schools to guarantee the students the best possible settings for social work practice education during the pandemic. Interestingly, Chap. 3 of this book proposed interpreting the social work practice adaptations during the pandemic within a continuum between learning and service, where some schools provided students with innovative online training activities rooted in professional practice and supporting students' reflexivity. Some schools allowed them to access the field through newly created service learning or volunteering activities.

It is clear enough that during the pandemic, the schools extended the range of possible social work practice education activities as an emergency strategy. However, after the pandemic, the value of such extensions for present and future social work practice education remains open for discussion. Chapter 4 of this book encourages us to interpret the activities situated on the service side of the continuum—namely service learning—as a precious opportunity to train civic-minded

professionals. In the context of the Global Definition of Social Work (IASSW & IFSW, 2014), this learning opportunity does not seem to be ancillary but crucial. Instead, Chaps. 5 and 9 push us to catch the value of the activities placed on the learning side of the continuum in terms of the possible opportunities they may provide for the education of reflexive practitioners. In some contexts (e.g., in Italy, see Chap. 9), experimenting with non-field practice activities centered on students' reflexivity may significantly contribute to further social work practice education development.

However, as several chapters have clearly illustrated, the inner limitations of the "practice" activities offered by the schools to the students have sometimes been so serious (e.g., no contact with service users, no direct supervision) that it is sometimes difficult to recognize the activities on the learning side of the continuum as "practice education" (possible *distortion* of social work practice education) and the activities on the service side as a professional learning program (possible *trivialization* of social work practice education).

A possible and sustainable way to use pandemic-related innovations would be to situate units for social work practice education in different stages of the curricula and characterize each stage with specific objectives and activities. Both the activities on the service and the learning sides of the continuum could be fruitfully used before and after field practice activities with the objective of reinforcing both the students' civic and reflexive competencies.

15.4.3 The Spread, Reuse, and Normalization of Digital Learning Methods in Social Work Practice Education: Problems and Opportunities

As mentioned in several chapters of this book, the pandemic accelerated existing trends, the main one of which probably concerns the use of ICT in higher education. The pandemic broke social work education's path and routines and forced the systematic adoption of digital learning methods. Although the schools in some countries already used these before the pandemic, their systematic and broader use within the specific context of practice education was a real novelty between 2020 and 2022 and has contributed to reshaping social work education after the pandemic.

Several chapters have shown how the global community of social work practice education made large use of ICT and digital learning methods in designing and implementing different kinds of unconventional activities that substituted or integrated students' learning experiences in the field.

As a summary, it can be concluded that the chapters have documented two paths along which the ICT-based pandemic innovations have been readapted and later reused.

First, the pandemic innovations have given the schools the chance to cope with next-extreme crises and difficulties—such as the earthquake in southern Turkey

(February 2023) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022)[2]—and provided the students with the opportunity to continue their practice education even when the access to the field as we know it in conventional social work education was dramatically difficult. Put briefly, the pandemic innovations gave the community of social work education know-how in digital education, which can be activated to cope with further emergencies.

Second, after the pandemic, ICT and digital learning methods have been included in ordinary social work practice education activities coherently, along with the long-lasting use of ICT in supervisors' usual work practice. Correspondingly with hybrid social work practice, in the aftermath of the pandemic, social work practice education seems to have adopted a hybrid model comprising core field activities developed in-person and face-to-face and further activities carried out remotely. The latter are mainly related to supervision, preparation and re-elaboration of field experiences and—marginally—to new activities with the service users (e.g., online calls).

The long-lasting use of ICT and digital learning methods in social work practice education offers opportunities and raises problems. While it is clear that they may give the system more flexibility, the chapters of this book also show that the digital divide may be an obstacle and that the actual modalities and outcomes of ICT-mediated supervision activities risk being implicit, invisible and beyond the control of the schools and the professional community. Some concern could also be expressed toward the educational effectiveness of the online activities for the preparation and re-elaboration of field experiences, especially in terms of students' attention retention (García-Morales et al., 2021). However, the partial digitalization of social work practice education has clearly contributed to enhancing educational pedagogy. It now seems to help prepare the students for the contemporary (partially) digitalized context of social work practice (Taylor-Beswick, 2023).

15.4.4 A Renewed Attention to the Students' Well-Being and Engagement?

Almost all of the chapters of this book have shown that the schools gave the students' needs renewed consideration during the pandemic. On the one hand, this meant paying explicit and significant attention to the students' learning and mental well-being, especially during the lockdowns. On the other hand, many chapters (see especially Chaps. 4, 7, and 10) highlighted that the schools more clearly recognized the student's role as co-producers. While the attention to the student's well-being and co-production in practice education is not entirely new, the pandemic again seems to have worked as an accelerator. Today, the attention to the needs and potentials of students seems to be more intensive in social work education than before (see especially Chap. 10).

[2] In the Ukrainian case, the service-learning model has been very effective in giving the students a fruitful chance of learning in the war context.

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