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Information Communication Technology during Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore social work educators' experiences of using technology to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last decade, there has been a move to digitalise higher education in many countries worldwide. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a mass exodus from the classroom to the home-based office at breakneck speed and highlighted, amongst other things, the digital divide that exists across the world. This research analysed data gathered from an international study that sought educators' views on various issues related to working during COVID-19. The data were analysed using a thematic approach. The results showed that social work educators, in general, were favourable to online teaching, although the findings highlight critical areas that require consideration in the climate of increased digitalisation and the uncertainty of when a return to a familiar teaching environment can occur. These findings are considered in terms of a social work education informed by critical pedagogy. The results have implications in terms of finding a workable balance between face-to-face teaching and online instruction.

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Introduction

COVID-19 challenged pedagogic processes in social work to their core through the introduction of remote technologies or information and communication technologies (ICT) to conduct classroom teaching, and in some cases, practice instruction. As this was such a fundamental change to normal teaching processes, we instigated an online survey under the auspices of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) to capture the experiences of social work educators, practice teachers and students in this new environment.

In this article, we examine the responses to the survey, and draw the conclusions that we can from the questionnaires we received back. Their number means that our work is largely indicative. While it highlights important trends, and thus identifies various gaps in the literature about the experiences of social work education's key stakeholders, it needs a larger funded study to speak more authoritatively about the resonance of the messages in these pages in countries absent from this study.

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Background

COVID-19 has brought with it dramatic changes in the way we live our lives. Across the world, lockdown policies have forced a move to online teaching platforms overnight. Governments in many countries ordered citizens to work from home, wherever they could. However, not all workers could do this, e.g. health and social care sectors workers. For those that worked from home, lockdown meant that their homes and work lives merged into one. Like many other sectors, higher education adapted and translated teaching practices from real-life classroom settings to virtual ones, impacting students and teachers worldwide (Mailizar et al., 2020). Social work educators suddenly had to change program and course plans and adapt their pedagogy to an online setting. While the change was sudden for some, for others, the online has been happening for some time. Perron et al. (2010) and James (2015) had been urging social workers to take seriously the impact of ICT a decade earlier.

Information and communications technology is a term generally used to refer to the convergence of audiovisual broadcast systems, telephones, and computer networks through a single cabling or linking system (Chan & Holosko, 2016). This technology's development enabled the social work community to teach, study, and practice online during this pandemic. Many countries have established national standards regarding the use of technology in practice to establish ethical work practice (Perron et al., 2010). Social work's professional bodies, such as the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), have developed social media policies that explicitly acknowledge the value of social media in social work practice (Chan & Holosko, 2016, p. 88). Boddy & Dominelli (2017) have argued for ethical behaviour in using social media and highlighted some dangers that social workers have to avoid when using social media to communicate with service users. Over the last decade, there have been considerable discussions, relevant for social work practice and research, on the use of the Internet amongst young people and safety practices especially in the face of evidence regarding their exploitation by predatory adults (Siegfried-Spellar & Soldino, 2020, & de Lucas yMurillo de la Cueva and D'Antonio Maceiras, 2020), digitalisation of social work, and educational institutions' pressures to integrating learning online (Vernon et al., 2009). Vernon et al. (2009) presented that online teaching in social work has increased, and the practice is widening (Phelan, 2015). New terminology, such as 'work from home' (WFH), has emerged in social work education. Understanding terms like synchronous learning (where the teaching material is delivered in real-time); asynchronous learning (teaching material that is archived and then made available anytime and anywhere); hybrid or blended environment (when e-learning technologies and traditional classroom-based education are combined) have become essential concepts for social work educators during COVID-19. Such developments have indicated the profession's resilience to adapt to technology while raising the question of what can be learnt from educators' experience of teaching online during a pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a move to online working for many sectors of society. It would be naïve to ignore the increasing interest of multinational corporations in investing billions in established and start-up businesses providing online education during the pandemic (Madianou, 2020). Known as Edtech, technology companies, they have been building a billion-dollar international industry worldwide over the last

decade. The ‘massive experiment of millions of people migrating online by default has been seized by companies which see opportunities not only for profit but also for entrenching themselves in public life’ (Madianou, 2020, p. 3). Such investment will lead to more time spent online across many domains of our life including health and education. With such investments at stake, it is unlikely that primary, secondary and tertiary education will return to their pre-pandemic forms. It is forecasted that globally, spending in the higher education market will reach up to 7.8 Trillion USD by 2030

(<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-education-idUKKCN26G16P>).

The growing middle class in places like China is driving demand and creating a climate for increased technological assimilation into everyday life (Morreale et al., 2018). The combined digitisation and privatisation of welfare can hollow out public institutions—not just welfare provision, but also schools, universities, and cities, which will further accentuate inequalities.

Technology has provided a much-needed defence to help society adjust to living with a pandemic. From a social work education perspective, it is vital to question seriously the impact of technology on critical pedagogies, crucial to social work teaching, in online settings. Historically speaking, social work has a disjointed approach to the perception and use of technologies (Taylor, 2017). This is manifest in the failure of social work educators not recognising the degree to which life routines are already embedded in the online world. Social work has had a ‘troubled’ relationship (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 1) with technology, with many seeing technology as a facet of the new public management encroachment and interference in relationship building. Critical pedagogies are essential to help students identify vested interests and dominant hegemonic discourses and practices and ensure that they develop critical perspectives regarding their future social work roles. In the mass digitalisation of education, the importance of relationship-based pedagogies can be easily forgotten. By identifying the experiences and giving voice to educators, we can offer a ‘bottom-up’ recapturing and reconfiguring of the discourses surrounding higher education and ICT’ (Selwyn, 2007, p. 91).

Critical pedagogies are based on critical theories and are built, in part, on the importance of relationships between educators and students. This makes it important to ask educators what impact ICT has had on their teaching, what kinds of social relations it has produced between student and teacher, what kinds of pedagogy does it enable and are social work values integrated in the teaching. Larisson & Korr’s (2013) (see also Wallengren-Lynch et al. (2020)) framework regarding signature pedagogy in social work education, helps frame our reflections and can be seen as embodying a critical, informed perspective in social work pedagogical processes that socialise future social workers with the knowledge and skills essential to making informed decisions and judgements:

- modelling relational connectedness, core practice skills, and values: modelling practice and values within the teaching-learning encounter is paramount to student understanding and the duplication of those same core conditions in their practice.
- fostering transformative awareness: acknowledging students own search for meaning through developing a capacity for intellectual and personal growth.
- nurturing personal and professional growth is a key aspect of social work training crucial to social work students’ development.

With this framework in mind, there are important lessons to be learnt from social work educators' experiences during COVID-19 in preparation for a future of delivering social work education online. Therefore, this research explores insights into such experiences to identify areas that need to be expressed as digitalisation of higher education proceeds apace post-pandemic.

Teaching across digital divides

Existing digital divides highlighted by Madianou (2020) among others, resulted in some countries faring better than others, depending on their levels of ICT infrastructures. For example, in primary education in the United Kingdom, over a third (34%) of parents with children aged 5 to 16 reported that their child had no access to computers or tablets at home (Montacute, 2020). Having access to this technology is a requirement for participating in distance learning. At tertiary level, universities with more resources at their disposal, were more agile in responding than others. Consequently, some programs were more able to shift online overnight. In a survey examining 97 students' perspectives on digitalisation found that students welcomed the digitalisation of teaching including the increased availability of online content. However, they 'fear[ed] the loss of social contact when face-to-face classes [we]re removed' (Brink et al., 2020, p. 967). Phelan (2015, p. 260) argues that e-learning, as learning through online technologies is also called, affords students opportunities to reduce the burdens of travel and related expenses. However, it has to be acknowledged that costs of heating, lighting and internet have increased. Specific technological innovations, such as asynchronous teaching, where available, allow students and practitioners the chance to further their education without the worry of being available at specific times for specific sessions. It is important to state that the research on the impact of ICT on social work is relatively scarce. Researchers such as, Phelan (2015, p. 260), for example, pointed out that the human connection, considered so crucial for social work, can be compromised using ICT through the lack of face-to-face contact. Phelan (p 260) concludes that although 'today's students may welcome and embrace technology,' there is still a need to understand how one can provide direction to students on their formation of critical thinking skills via the use of technology. The aligning of ICT is complex. Knowles (2007, p. 23) comments that the:

If social work educators [who] are going to implement and sustain e-learning in their programs successfully require an examination of curricula, integrating learning models that are appropriate for both social work education and online learning environments, balancing asynchronous and synchronous learning, the ability to teach in online environments, developing new approaches to assessment and evaluation, and resources to develop high-quality interactive learning experiences that are specifically designed for a broad range of social work content and professional skill development.

Knowles (2007, p. 24) describes that regarding higher education's competitive market has outpaced the 'opportunity for in-depth dialogue, about questions and concerns social work' has about ICT. However, given the widespread use of ICT to deliver social work education during the COVID-19 pandemic we are presented with a unique opportunity to have this dialogue and to identify and work through the various strengths and challenges of ICT.

Archer-Kuhn et al. (2020) provide an account of adjusting to teaching social work during COVID-19 from a Canadian perspective. These authors' experiences of supporting students on placement and moving to entirely online teaching echo a reality for many social work educators worldwide. They write that,

This led to unimaginable additional work at an already busy time, including overnight addendums to course outlines; urgent protocol and policy development; time-sensitive communication; and immediate professional, program and curriculum development. All of this had to be coordinated through lengthy and frequent meetings that stripped us of time to attend to our tasks and reflect on our well-being (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020, p. 1012).

Despite reflections on the long-term impact on pedagogy and their well-being, they state that 'we embraced technology and found energy in innovation through collaboration' (Archer-Kuhn et al., 2020, p. 1012). These stories of success are also countered by many teachers' and students' anecdotal narratives describing the challenges of being embedded in online learning 'a challenge too far', as they struggled with caring for children at home, home-schooling, doing their work alongside the cooking and cleaning for everyone, and finding that their technological skills were no match for what was demanded of them.

There are numerous challenges for educators in integrating technology into social work education during a pandemic. De Jonge et al. (2020) refers to the significance regarding the process of meeting others within the academic and professional community of social work for students in the Netherlands to discuss and reflect on important issues. The act of meeting in real life facilitates 'learning through exposure to complex and ill-structured social practice and reflection on the alignment between scientific knowledge, practice knowledge and accessing service user's knowledge—[are] crucial to social work education' (De Jonge et al. 2020, p 1030). In other countries, such as India, the sudden shift from classroom learning to digital learning has had significant impacts on poorer students (Bania & Banerjee, 2020). From a Dutch perspective, De Jonge et al. (2020, p. 1030) inform us that:

Since visiting schools was no longer possible students had to study entirely at home, without face-to-face contact for guidance and cooperation, without study facilities and without the structure of a fixed timetable.

In addition, students were confronted with a substantial loss of their usual supports and daily routines. Students, facing social isolation during national lockdown struggled to find a balance between studying and leisure, and had problems concentrating on their studies. Changes in education also made learning style differences between students more visible, thus benefitting students able to access and process the information. Papouli et al. (2020, p. 1112) surveying social work students in Greece found that digital technology was used to 'help, students stay active, connected and engaged while practising physical distancing during the lockdown'. Their findings, however, suggested that the lack of technological resources and support, slow or no internet access posed severe consequences for students' studying, socialising and living.

While higher education institutions in the Global North have managed to implement digital learning well, higher education institutes in African and South Asian countries have to overcome many challenges before shifting entirely to digital learning modes. The digital divide highlighted even more fundamental issues, such

as the role of social work in society. Amadasun (2020) argues that from an African perspective, COVID-19 provided an opportunity to reimagine and rebrand the entire social work education and practice' to account for the global dimensions of COVID-19, the ongoing risk factors for future pandemics, and climate crisis. Onalu et al. (2020, p. 1037) support this position following their reflections on Nigeria's social work education. These authors' critiqued the lack of social work practitioners in public health planning to meet the challenges of COVID-19 in Nigeria. In line with Amadasun, Onalu et al. (2020, p. 1044) see that 'social work education in Nigeria is inadequate as it prepares practitioners to respond to micro- or casework-allied problems while leaving them disempowered and overwhelmed in the face of macro social problems'. Similarly, Amadasun et al. (2000, p. 1044) argue that the:

Gap created by this non-involvement presents an opportunity to update the social work curriculum to accommodate new courses on public health and disaster management. It is believed that the revised social work curriculum will equip social workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to address any future pandemic and even post-pandemic activities.

Methodology

The answer the research questions this paper draws on data gathered from a survey questionnaire disseminated through the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) website. The IASSW is an international association of tertiary-level social work educational programmes called 'schools', and social work educators. The survey had over 40 questions, with the majority as open-ended questions to invite participants to write freely and at-length. The survey, using the software Sunet, was opened in mid-December and closed in mid-January, 2020/2021. During that time, 166 people, representing 32 countries from across all continents replied (See Table 1). The vast majority of those who replied (80%) were women and evenly spread across the age range of 25–61 years. Close to half of the sample had doctorate degrees in social work or social work-related subjects. Over half of the respondents were either full-time or part-time educators. Another 15% of respondents considered themselves a combination of educator and practitioner. Overall, the sample had a higher representation of educators than students and practitioners, with 22% of respondents being practitioners, working part-time or full-time, and 14% were full-time students.

The data, in the form of respondent's statements, was imported to NVivo, and subsequently themes were created using an inductive approach, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Codes were identified first and subsequently used to create the themes.

Table 1. List of countries who participated in the research.

Israel	Sweden	India	United States of America	Canada	Botswana
Australia	Philippines	Guyana	Portugal	Belgium	India
Greece	Slovenia	Japan	Chile	Malaysia	Germany
Norway	Sri Lanka	Malawi	Nigeria	United Kingdom	Indonesia
Zambia	Scotland	Wales	Kenya	Finland	Russia
Romania	South Africa				

The respondents are not identifiable nor known to the researchers, and since only those that wish to respond did, providing whatever information they wished to share, separate ethical approval was not required. However, ethical consideration was given to confidentiality. Each respondent was presented with a consent form and information about the research before moving to the online survey. The respondent identities were unknown to the researchers.

The descriptive statistics were generated automatically by the survey system used to administrate the survey.

Results & analysis

In this section, we will begin by briefly presenting a descriptive analysis of the findings relevant to the research focus of this paper. The results from the study showed that over 72% of those surveyed consider that the technology was adequate in meeting their professional needs in terms of being fit for purpose. The access to good broadband was more varied, with only 60% believing it adequate. Interestingly 67% of respondents considered that they would continue to teach and study using online technologies. Regarding ethics and ethical issues, 40% of respondents responded that they had encountered such problems while using ICT during COVID-19. Over 72% of respondents were aware of digital inequalities existing for their colleagues or students.

This section continues by presenting four themes from the data, namely ‘managing the relationship between educator and student, inequality in ICT infrastructures, online practices and finally, hybrid pedagogies. These themes are interconnected yet highlight significant areas of interest identified in the respondents’ survey responses.

Managing the relationship between educator and student

Relationships with the students were a dominant theme which emerged from the research. . Many of the respondents, connecting to a critical pedagogical approach, referred to the importance of face-to-face contact in building academic relationships with students. One commented that ‘for some aspects (of teaching), you need to have a physical presence’. From respondents’ point of view, the human element, while challenging to pin down in exact words, is hard to replicate online. According to one respondent the online experience often ‘became a one-sided conversation’. Many referred to the challenges of getting a flow online to ‘lack of direct contact with the students’. There was a sense from the data that online is effective and gets the job done, but it cannot compensate for face-to-face as ‘there’s always be something missing’. There was an underlying tone that social work educators consider that personal meetings are necessary to teach social work and that it needs ‘human relationships in a natural and real way’. The implications are not just for the educators, but there is also a risk that solely online may impact ‘students’ capacity to reach their full potential. Some of the respondents felt that ‘students tend to hide their problems and [are] reluctant to discuss them when connected via online and common platforms’.

Many of the respondents found managing integrity online challenging. For instance, ‘during seminars, people are doing improper things in front of their camera, forgetting to mute their microphone and sharing private stuff to all students’. The comments regarding integrity were strongly connected to one’s physical space as the camera brought one directly into the private space to do work. Negotiating the use of the camera was an item of constant feedback from respondents, for example, ‘you are working from your home, so you have to think about what is visible on the screen. You have to consider that not everyone wants to show what is in their home and give students/clients the option not to use their video for reasons of privacy’. Educators were considerate about a student’s environment. Some allowed students to have a free choice. One even commented that they ‘proactively welcome children who curiously pop into the screen to hug their parent during class. And pets are always welcome to my class’. To bridge the physical gap, one educator commented that because ‘using technology tends to minimise human interaction (human touch in teaching) ... (they) greet the students and have a small talk before the class starts. When we have a discussion, I also try to communicate with the students. When the class ends, again I greet them and say something like, “Please take care and stay healthy. It’s great you have participated very well”’. However, in general, the respondents commented that they lacked the physical connection with students that one gets in the classroom. When this is absent the teaching of critical pedagogies becomes more challenging. Based on the respondents comments it is apparent that a social work education, framed by modelling, fostering and nurturing (Larsson & Korr, 2013) takes on an added complexity when a computer screen mediates the interaction. For most respondents, the online world was devoid of a natural feel to the teacher and student exchanges. It is clear from these respondents that a social work education requires, at least in part, this type of contact.

Inequality in ICT infrastructures

The cost of the Internet is an issue impacting the social work community of educators and students worldwide. In poorer countries, ‘many students had multiple internet users online at once’ and students ‘who have spoken about not having enough computers to share between family members with an increased number [of them] working online’. People are impacted by the high internet costs as well as erratic Internet connectivity challenges. Respondents commented that online teaching is adequate as long as there is a fast and effective internet service. Many were concerned that access to technology had a discriminatory impact on students who did not have the economic resources to afford high speed high-speed even if there was high-speed available. In some countries, the impact on students can be considerable given ‘exorbitant costs.’ As one respondent commented, ‘middle- and upper-class students have strong internet connection while the poor ones just rely on their prepaid data load’. One respondent commented that many students do not have consistent internet access, ‘either due to cost or actual physical location. So, they drive and sit in parking lots to get WIFI. It’s horrendously unjust. I would never teach like this in the future.’

Some universities had to make sure all students were supplied with data packages however, despite this many from low-income family backgrounds were disadvantaged. Even students from remote areas where internet infrastructures are low or non-existent were disproportionately impacted. However, creative efforts were made to assist students in this regard, e.g. late submission via WhatsApp. For some students, campuses made provisions for distributing hot spots and loaning computers and other soft and hardware to students.

Some commented that ‘there is a shortage of secure and reliable software for international communication. Zoom was not convenient in some developing countries. We had to obtain additional funds to get students equipment so that they could work online’. Inequality has undoubtedly been highlighted even more than it has ever before, according to one respondent, who goes on to say that

The divide between the haves and the have-nots is so much more evident. We are very grateful that from the beginning as the social work department, we were acutely aware of the inequalities and there set out to ensure that our teaching required the absolute minimum in terms of resources.

In the main, most educators, in the Global North, are in well-paid jobs and can pay for services and devices to help their work, even if they are not compensated. For example, one educator commented that ‘Internet service is not great in rural communities and even in city the internet service hasn’t been equitable. I bought a \$400 Google nest to improve my internet access, but most folks cannot afford this. Also, the University didn’t pay for this, so we paid out of our own pocket’. The inequality of access to ICT is a stark reminder that social inequalities reach into the online world. With the social work mission to challenge social injustices critical voices with social work education must be present.

Online practices

Over 40% of the respondents considered that they had experienced issues of to be of an ethical nature and implications with their online teaching. Some educators found ‘students recording without permission’ while other respondents had discussions with students who argued that the use of online platforms feed into the interests of technology companies and therefore, were resistant to using such platforms. Another respondent stated that stated that,

One of my students wanted her boyfriend, who was home with her, to sit in on one of my diversity and social justice class. I had to decline her request because part of the class involved my students sharing their personal stories, so I had to protect their privacy. Given that I have no control over her home environment, the boyfriend might as well be in the room with her while I was teaching, but he was not a visible member of the class.

Many others poised more questions indicating the area of ethics in online teaching us new and uncharted for many trying to find workable solutions in the moment. For example, one respondent commented that,

The issue of using the camera while online is complicated. Is it OK to be at class and not have your camera on? When is it OK to record sessions, and what happens with these recordings? External speakers record lectures which can be used more than once - how do we monitor this? Do all students access their lectures? How do we monitor attendance and their contributions?

Some respondents identified an issue with using Apps outside of class that are not monitored for group work. These types of interactions have also changed because of the online setting drawing into questions of students work. One respondent felt that it has ‘caused a diminishment of accountability and relationality in the interactions between students, without adequate structures in place to address this, e.g. problematic comments have been made by students, which I think would have been addressed if they happened in person in a class’. In other examples, ‘students inappropriately dressed during class (i.e. PJs), students with an unmade bed visible during class, and students smoking weed during class’. Some lamented the lack of policy in their institution regarding online teaching. The consequence of this lack of internet etiquette (or netiquette) and professionalism reminds us of the role that a social work education has in helping students develop the competencies needed to become professional social workers.

Hybrid pedagogies

For many respondents, teaching online was helpful, but at the same many commented that ‘it would not be my first choice. Though I am grateful to have the option’. While it was better than nothing for some, others had positive experiences. Some found that while it ‘requires innovation and creativity, it was generally adequate for a pandemic, but nothing I want to continue post-pandemic’. The online approaches afford flexibility for both teachers and students. Those who had previous ICT experiences appeared to be more positive; ‘I had worked remotely for many years before this degree, so I was used to using telephone and email to get my work done’. Others reflected that ‘it solves some problems for students who live away from the university campus. It also has some pedagogic advantages—I use breakout rooms and polls regularly’. Others say the opportunities with using ICT during COVID-19 as a tool enabled them to work ‘more with students across the country as our program has expanded. At first, I was worried about our ability to do this well, but it’s working really, really well, and I’m glad for it.’

‘In one of my Zoom Meetings, I saw a student who was sitting on a mountaintop in order to be part of my class. That was really heartening.’ This image both delights and awakens. The potential of ICT is that it can reach more people and make education more accessible. However, the question remains what kind of education? As many respondents indicated, ICT was good for ‘delivering information to large cohorts, but not so good for discussing practice skills and seeing how they do their practice holistically’. Educators had to readjust their approaches to compensate for not being able to do role plays for instance. More was required of students to be engaged and make links between the topics. Other aspects of social work education, such as supervising the thesis writing process and learning how to write reports, were considered more suitable. However, when it came to ‘teaching clinical materials [it] is somewhat difficult in particular when you have role plays and case studies’.

For some respondents, there was a concern that future social work delivered in an ICT world is ‘that standards will drop, and education will become more of a product’. To balance this, it was suggested by some that ‘more work needs to be done to make opportunities for informal networking which is something you normally get on campus but has been lacking in virtual school’. In line with others, one respondent expressed that

‘I think the crisis creates unique opportunities for innovation that encourage more effective and efficient practices. I will use the strategies I learned during this situation to continue to improve my teaching’.

For others, the clash between flexibility and accessibility was contrasted by the personal feelings connected with not physically meeting with students. One respondent said, ‘I would continue to hold Zoom office hours, field meetings, and other student meetings—but I’ll go back to teaching in person when I can’.

There was a consensus that there are elements of online teaching that would undoubtedly remain way beyond COVID –19, which would surely impact the social work curriculum. It has, however, become very clear from the respondents that social work teaching requires face-to-face teaching and learning, and ‘we need our students to go into organisations and communities for practice education’. Much like the practice of social work, social work education needs to enable ‘social interactions to flourish’. Others have a more fatalistic position, as indicated by one comment that ‘there’s no turning back. Now that this has shifted to online options, people will demand that these options continue to be available’.

Discussion & conclusion

This research has presented the views of a sample of social work educators from across the globe to gather perspectives on using ICT to teach social work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The respondents highlighted issues around ethics and etiquette during online teaching. Given the increased digitalisation of social work practice, educators and students need to learn how to manage ethics and etiquette issues so to help build professional competencies in digital settings. The respondents’ views have relevance for a social work education that will emerge in a post-pandemic world of increased digitalisation of third-level education. Social work education will need to navigate increased online learning and the need for face-to-face contact with students to deliver a robust and authentic social work education.

There is no escaping the fact that online education is big business, and the move to digitalise higher education is driven by several factors. COVID-19 has resulted in some respects as a crash test for this process on a global scale. Social work educators have adapted and reacted to this new reality. However, it is important to understand what lessons can be learnt from using ICT to teach social work during COVID-19. By generating this insight, we offer a perspective to be considered in the ongoing discussion regarding digitalisation in third-level education.

One clear message from the results in this research is that, at the very least, face to face education is necessary in some form in social work education post-pandemic. For this to happen, social work educators must adapt, be creative, engage student voices, and innovate by testing and evaluating different pedagogies and even their applicability with various technological tools. On top of this, given the unequal access to technology, social work educators need to advocate for digital equality and make this an internationally discussed issue. Included in this advocacy are civil liberties and privacy and surveillance issues that affect students, educators, and service users (Madianou, 2020). A hybrid education comprising of online delivery and face to face experiences has the potential to be very exciting. Still, social work’s

values and integrity must remain present in the discussion on digitalisation in higher education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Carin Cuadra is a professor in social work at the Department of social work. Her interests have involved distributing security, welfare and welfare services with an underpinning interest for vulnerability, insecurity and risk in human life. Her current research involves eco-social interventions in local contexts.

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