Editorial

Digital Intervention for Advancing Social Work and Welfare Education

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1. Editorial Introduction

The Editors are delighted to introduce this Special Issue of *Social Sciences*, which focuses on the application of technology and digital interventions in social work and community welfare teaching. The field of social work education and practice is being reshaped by technological innovation, demanding detailed consideration of how we prepare the next generation of practitioners. As social work represents a relational practice focused on human interactions, social workers and social work educators may be reluctant to utilise technology in their work; however, technological innovation has become essential in contemporary professional environments. Hence, this Special Issue explores the challenges, opportunities, benefits, and ethical considerations encountered in social work education, along with the implications of digitisation for preparing graduates for changes in social work practice.

The seven articles contained in this Special Issue highlight the fact that the field of social work is currently at a pivotal point. In the context of technology playing an increasing role in practical settings, new practitioners will be at the forefront of shifts and innovations in rapidly changing services. The ideas and evidence presented by our contributors reveal the transformative potential of digital technologies in social work education and practice.

For example, Jefferies (2024) demonstrates how practice simulations presented using H5P scenarios provide immediate feedback and build students' confidence, while the work of Fox and Singer (2025) highlights how using podcasting and digital storytelling as a pedagogical tool can deepen students' empathy and critical thinking through authentic case studies and practitioner insights. Moreover, virtual reality simulations using avatars, as documented in Vidman and Tham's (2024) scoping review, help to create safe spaces for students to develop crucial practical skills and tackle complex scenarios that have previously been difficult to replicate.

The collaborative possibilities enabled by technology are equally striking. Two articles written by Darracott (2024) and Rose et al. (2024) both illustrate that online platforms can be used in social work education to break down barriers, including social, ecological, geographical, etc., fostering rich connections between students, educators, and researchers. Meanwhile, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and challenges. Both Reimer's (2024) and Chan and Nurrosyidah's (2025) articles point to the importance of incorporating AI literacy into social work curricula while addressing critical concerns over ethics, equity, and access.

2. Ethical Technology in Social Work Education: Balancing Innovation with Core Values

Across these articles, a consistent theme emerges: that the adoption of technology in social work must remain in accordance with the core ethical principles of the profession. Our contributors emphasise that as we embrace these new tools, we must remain vigilant towards their potential to either bridge and reduce or widen existing social inequalities. The digital divide remains a pressing concern, requiring deliberate strategies to ensure inclusive and accessible learning experiences for all students. Moreover, we must prepare students to critically engage with the ethical implications of the changes that technological innovation can lead to, including algorithmic bias and broader societal impacts. Each application of technology raises ethical questions, requiring critical awareness of its impacts and implications in order to inform the correct use of technology in practice. The articles included in this Special Issue not only highlight opportunities but also challenge practitioners and students to develop a nuanced, critical understanding of emerging technologies, empowering them to more effectively and ethically apply these tools while remaining mindful of their potential impacts on the vulnerable people they will serve.

3. Relational Technology in Social Work Education: Balancing Innovation with Human-Centred Skills

Another key theme of this Special Issue is that the future of social work education lies not in technology alone but in its thoughtful integration with traditional human-centred skills. All the authors emphasise the vital importance of maintaining a holistic approach that balances technological competence with foundational social work values and skills, in particular, empathy, communication, and relationship-building. The overall message is that educators must help students understand the potential and limitations of technology while preserving the irreplaceable value of human connection in social work practice.

The insights gathered in this Special Issue provide guidance for social work educators attempting to meaningfully integrate technological innovation into their teaching practice. Going forward, there is a clear objective: we must prepare social work students to be both technologically adept and ethically grounded practitioners. By embracing these advancements with critical awareness and ethical consideration, in conjunction with a focus on the human and relational aspects of practice, we can equip our students to harness the potential of technology for social good while remaining true to our profession's core values and commitment to social justice. This is not merely about adapting to technological change; it is about leading with wisdom, ethics, and a steadfast commitment to human dignity.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

List of Contributions

1. (Chan and Nurrosyidah 2025) Chan, Chitat, and Afifah Nurrosyidah. 2025. Democratizing AI for social good: A bibliometric-systematic review through a social science lens. *Social Sciences* 14: 30. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14010030.
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3. (Fox and Singer 2025) Fox, Mim, and Jonathan Singer. 2025. Podcasting as an Innovative Pedagogical Tool in Social Work Education. *Social Sciences* 14: 47. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14010047.
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5. (Reimer 2024) Reimer, Elizabeth Claire. 2024. Examining the Role of Generative AI in Enhancing Social Work Education: An Analysis of Curriculum and Assessment Design. *Social Sciences* 13: 648. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13120648.

6. (Rose et al. 2024) Rose, Joanne, Carmel Halton, Louise Morley, and Monica Short. 2024. Bridging Boundaries: Technology Enabled Collaborative Cross-Institutional and Transnational Social Work Placement Projects. *Social Sciences* 13: 659. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13120659.

7. (Vidman and Tham 2024) Vidman, Åsa, and Pia Tham. 2024. Dialogue with avatars in simulation-based social work education: A scoping review. *Social Sciences* 13: 628. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13110628.