Using interactive animations to support supervision relationships for social work students on placement

Research article

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Abstract

Interactive animations (IA) as a learning tool have been used in higher education to enhance the learning of students. In combination with the practices of work integrated learning (WIL) this study aimed to develop a suite of interactive animations to support the learning of social work students on placement. Specifically, the interactive animations focused on enhancing the relationship between the student and their placement supervisor. Using a mixed method design this study utilised a collaborative approach to develop and explore the potential for using interactive animations in the teaching of Field Education (FE) in social work. The results of the study found that the use of interactive animations was viewed as a positive and useful approach by students and supervisors. Specifically, the use of short animations, with targeted messages was found to be innovative and provided an enhanced WIL experience. Suggestions for future research are explored and presented.

Keywords: *Field Education, Interactive Animation, Social Work Education, Social Work, Supervision, Work Integrated Learning*

Introduction

Background

Critical feedback from the social work sector and students have shown varied levels of student engagement, participation, and success during Field Education placements (Bellinger, 2010; Bogo, 2015). Included in this feedback are concerns about the lack of quality placement opportunities for social work students (Morris et al., 2020; Zuchowski, Collingwood, et al., 2021). As such, it is becoming increasingly important to consider the sustainability of field education placements and what opportunities may be available for alternative practices within current placement models (Bellinger, 2010; Neden et al., 2018; Zuchowski, Collingwood, et al., 2021). Current research into social work placements has indicated a need for contingency planning, future proofing and a rethinking on placements models, that cater to a changing student population within social work courses (Battaglia & Flynn, 2020; Bellinger, 2010; Crisp & Hosken, 2016; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Sanders et al., 2023; Zuchowski, Collingwood, et al., 2021). Supervision is seen to be key to the experience of students (Cleak & Wilson, 2022b). However, there is limited research on the placement supervision in social work with current studies tending to focus on the student experience of supervision (Zuchowski, 2014; Zuchowski, Cleak, et al., 2021), the impact of issues such as COVID-19 (Sanders et al., 2023; Zuchowski, Collingwood, et al., 2021), the role of placement supervisors (Hickson et al., 2015; Sanders et al., 2023; Zuchowski, 2014)) and the importance of connection between the student and the supervisor (Zuchowski, 2014).

The supervisory relationship is critical to social work education as it supports students' transition through university and into lifelong practice as a Social Worker (Cleak & Wilson, 2022a; Hickson et al., 2015; Rogers, 2020). Therefore, it is important for students to learn and embed supervision skills into their own practice framework (Davys & Beddoe, 2020). As an essential component of social work practice, it is the supervision and the discussion generated which enable the needs of service users to remain a core focus of practice (Davys & Beddoe, 2020; Noble, 2020), alongside skill development and the integration of theory with practice (Noble, 2020). It is this integration of theory with practice with which students often struggle during their placements and supervision provides a unique space for students to explore these connections in a safe and supported way before they enter the work force (Loos & Kostecki, 2018). While Cleak and Wilson (2022b) suggest that a supervision contract should be negotiated by students on placement, this can be a difficult task for students who have previously not had this experience. In particular, international students can lack confidence, especially in their first placement (Cleak & Wilson, 2022b).

Supporting students with their placements has driven a rethink of university work integrated learning (WIL) (Leach, 2000). Work integrated learning is 'an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum' (Patrick et al., 2009, p. iv) and is a form of learning that requires the student to be situated in the workplace. Specifically, in social work, Field Education (FE) placements are a compulsory requirement of the degree and as such there is a necessity to provide adequate resources and guidance, which is essential for building social work students' confidence, knowledge and in sustaining their motivation in the degree (Leach, 2000).

Kaye et al. (2019) suggests that the sector has expectations around student preparedness for WIL success, with a focus on graduate employability (Whelan, 2017). Supporting social work students to undertake WIL through two FE placements requires adequate resources and guidance which are both essential to enable the students to build their confidence, knowledge and sustain their motivation (Leach, 2000).

Interactive animations (IA) as an educational learning tool is new to social work but has been used with success in a variety of disciplines in higher education, such as, economics, biology, engineering and computer science, to improve students' academic performance and increase interest in learning (Barut & Dursun, 2022; El Hammoumi et al., 2022; Pinter et al., 2012). For instance, Pinter et al. (2017) measured the impact of IA in teaching computing science (n = 441) and engineering (n=464) students and found that learning with well-designed educational tools such as IA could have a positive impact on the academic performance of students. Further, research investigating 255 university students' perceptions of IA in biology education found that 74% of students believed that IA increased their interest in the course (El Hammoumi et al., 2022). Moreover, the use of technological innovations in FE offers an opportunity for students to self-reflect, which is important for student success (Kourgiantakis et al., 2020). In addition, Wilson and Flanagan's (2021) study found that students struggled most with autonomy and self-directed learning on placement. The use of IA in higher education, offers a valuable self-directed learning tool that can support student autonomy, while bridging the gap between education and work. In response, our study sought to understand how IA can support social work students' learning during Field Education and asked: the following question:

> *How can interactive animations support social work students on placement to develop supervisory relationships?*

Method

This study employed a mixed-method design which is useful when exploring data from several different perspectives ensuring that pre-existing assumptions are less likely to impact data collection (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The explanatory approach by Creswell and Clark (2007) utilised quantitative data collection followed by qualitative data collection from social work practitioners during consultation and from students survey responses, which allowed for analysis of connections between the four phases of implementation (Figure 1). This approach was chosen to obtain insights into the IA design and development, and the success of IA for social work learning and WIL, specifically in relation to supervisory relationships. The research included two current subject coordinators, who were teaching into the BSW and MSWQ components of the Field Education program, to reduce the power imbalance, the survey was developed by the research team, and promoted in class by tutors who were not part of the research team. Participation by students was not compulsory and ethics approval was obtained from the University of Wollongong HREC ID 2023/11 to conduct this study.
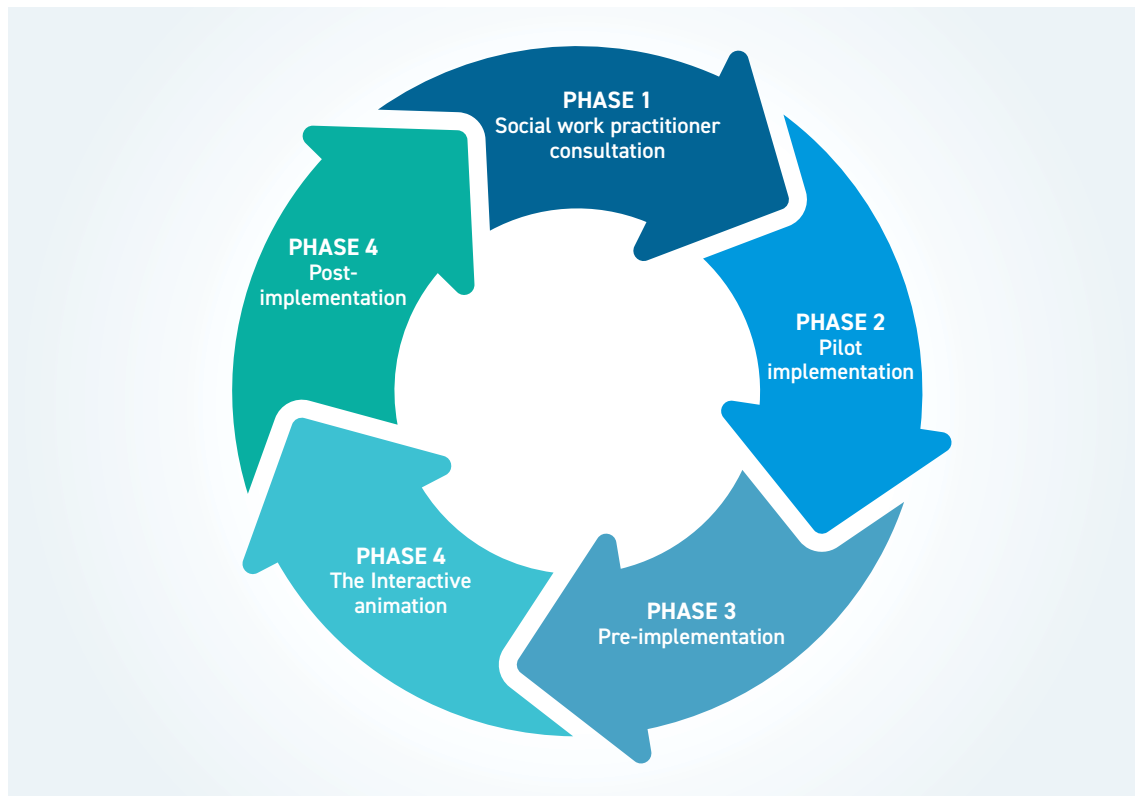
Figure 1: Phases of study

▶ *Phase One: Social Work practitioner consultation*

During Phase One, social work practitioners identified as experts in the field were invited to participate in a group or individual interview regarding their experiences of student supervision during FE placement. They were also asked questions regarding their view on the use of IA.

▶ *Phase Two: Pilot implementation*

During Phase Two, a pilot implementation survey was tested with a cohort of n=29 students undertaking their first placement in the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). The survey allowed the research team to seek clarity on the questions relating to the both the animation and supervision topics. For example, we asked about different kinds of animations style with features which would encourage engagement, preferred length, 2D vs 3D animation, we then updated the survey tool based on the pilot data results in Phase 3. The pilot implementation survey also included questions adapted from statements in Cleak and Wilson (2022b) which focused on styles and approaches to supervision.

▶ *Phase Three: Pre-implementation*

During Phase Three, pre-implementation, a survey was disseminated to students from the BSW and the Master of Social Work Qualifying (MSWQ) (n=118) at the commencement of their placement, to gain insights into their learning needs to support the design and development of the IA.

▶ *Phase Four: The Interactive Animation*

During this phase, the animation videos, were embedded with instructions and prompts for student learning in two modules on the Field Education Moodle sites for three subjects including BSW and MSWQ.

▶ *Phase Five: Post-implementation*

During Phase Four, a post-implementation survey was disseminated (n=114) immediately after the students watched the IA during the final placement seminar. Both BSW and MSWQ students were invited to participate and variations in group differences were explored.

All surveys were administered via the online survey platform, Qualtrics (2023).

Data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using simple descriptive statistics (Woodrow, 2014) and the qualitative data was analysed using a coding approach developed by Saldana (2021). This involved exporting the qualitative responses from the survey, into a Microsoft Excel database and conducting pre-coding to highlight key quotes and passages of text. Next, the research team reviewed the data and agreed on a coding framework which included a table of the raw data, the preliminary codes and the final codes. An 'In Vivo Coding' framework (Saldana, 2021) is useful for data that is capturing the participant voice, their experience and actual words and allows for a deeper understanding of meaning. The final stage involved sorting the codes into categories to identify the themes and sub-themes, refined by two members of the research team. All team members then reviewed the themes and sub themes and agreed they were reflective of the data collected.

Results

As this study involved a mixed method approach where each phase connected to the next, the results are presented in the same order as described in the methods.

▶ **Phase One: Social Work practitioner consultation**

The consultation with social work practitioners is summarised in Table 1 below. Practitioners identified five key areas of focus for the content of the IA regarding supervision. These included:

1) a range of supervisory strategies capturing both formal and informal interactions,

2) acknowledging student diversity as a learning opportunity,

3) the need to establish clear parameters and expectations of the supervisory relationship,

4) the importance of establishing trust and

5) acknowledging that the relationship is reciprocal and supervision on placement provides a learning opportunity for both the student and the supervisor.

Table 1: Consultation feedback

No.	Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Examples
1	Range of supervisory strategies (formal to informal)	Supervision as a spectrum	Share reflection on adapting the supervision style to the needs and learning styles of the students. Mix of formal supervision with learning contract and informal day-to-day feedback and check-ins during practice. Offer a selection of reflective frameworks to allow students to choose one that works best for them. Examples include "demonstrating, shadowing, providing feedback, as well as having a conversation afterwards, drawing out the learning." A more formal/authoritative style is helpful at the beginning to set expectations and boundaries. Over time, supervision becomes more facilitative as students take ownership of supervision.
		The importance of formal supervision	For a student to pass a placement, they have to have formal supervision every week.
		The importance of 'just in time' supervision	A lot of it (supervision) is around triage and crisis management. So, just making sure that nothing has been too difficult. Providing support for interpersonal issues through their placement and managing workplace issues. Younger students may not have had a lot of workplace experience.
2	Acknowledging student diversity as a learning opportunity	Variety of student supervision experiences	Encourage students to take control over supervision as much as possible. "I like to try and understand where the students [are] coming from... some of them have never had supervision."
		Cultural differences	"International students have many different concepts, and my barrier is my lack of understanding of their home country and their experience there."
		Differences in work experience	"Sometimes, it is the first time they've stepped into a team environment. So, part of that supervision is negotiating that team dynamic and how they can get into it." Acknowledging the difference in skills and ability, both practical and socio-emotional, in the different levels of students and student experience.
3	Need for shared expectations and understanding around supervision	Clear expectations around what the placement and supervision will look like (overall)	Different for students who are used to the workplace vs new/younger students who need more support to understand the role of supervisory sessions and feedback. 1:1 intensive feedback might not be something they are used to or have experience with. "Some students don't know what to expect. So, I explain what supervision is about, explain my role. I explain my expectations. So, we sort of have a verbal contract at the very beginning."

No.	Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Examples
		Clear expectations around what the placement and supervision will look like (day-to-day)	Students need to be taught how to use supervision sessions as a tool for learning. *"Students come with a very limited understanding about supervision when they come to us."* *"Include things like a particular supervision framework that you might like, let's just say, for instance, it's Gibbs or Fox. What are some of the issues that you can be talking about in supervision? And strongly encourage them to be constantly bringing in their learning contract into the space to keep their learning front of mind for both them and the supervisor."*
4	The importance of trust on both sides	Need for students to be committed and engaged	Strong theme on student willingness both as a barrier and an enabler. Student attitudes towards the placement have a direct impact on their experience. *"The student that says nothing, basically, that's a significant barrier."*
		Supervision as a space for difficult conversations	*"It's better to have it discussed now in the open and a chance to reflect on it than having too many rules about what you can and can't say, even though you need to have some guidelines about that. I've had students sometimes work through quite successfully some issues around race and various other things that were quite problematic for them and felt comfortable to do so".* *"Some people have hesitation talking about things that they're not comfortable with at the organisation, for example, swearing or derogatory remarks against a particular group and creating that space so that we're able to talk about them and, and because I'm looking at it from an outsider's point of view I can help with the reflection and give my perspective on a particular issue."*
		Enabling independent reflection	*"Initially, support students to develop the language of supervision and reflection and demonstrate and teach them how to use reflective practice that they can take on to group supervision and the workplace. Wanting them to own the process and teach them the skills that they can then take away with them."* *"I encourage them to come up with an agenda, come up with issues, or remind them of their reflective journal. We go through some of the events that have happened and that they've documented."*

No.	Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Examples
5	Supervision is an opportunity for both supervisor and student	Opportunities of supervision	*"Placement is an opportunity for students to try a service and find their place. When you recognise an exceptional student, you start building a relationship with them early on and try to shape a pathway. Also, important to recognise students who might excel in a different pathway."* Practical in goal setting. *"Making sure that if there's something that they have shown an interest in that I can provide that opportunity the best I can."*
		Barriers as an external supervisor	*"What we're getting is their own lens on what's happening, and we don't see their practice at all. So, for me, it's kind of digging really deep into getting an understanding of what their practice is like."* *"Occasionally you get students that really don't value things like theory and ethics, reflectivity, and reflexivity."*

▶ Phase Two: Pilot implementation results

We surveyed the Autumn cohort of first placement BSW students in July to pilot the survey tool and obtain some initial feedback on using IA to support supervision. A total of n=29 students completed the pilot survey. We asked the students to think about the role of supervision and the supervisory relationship in response to the questions presented in Table 2. Please note, as not all students answered all questions in the survey, there is variation in the response totals which are noted below.

Table 2: Role of supervision

#	Question	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal	Total
1	To assist the development of the student's professional competence.	0, 0%	0, 0%	5, 17%	7, 24%	17, 59%	29 (100%)
2	To appreciate and assess the student's theoretical base, skills, knowledge, and personal abilities.	0, 0%	1, 3%	6, 21%	10, 34%	12, 41%	29 (100%)
3	To understand the student's preferred learning style.	0, 0%	2, 7%	5, 17%	13, 45%	9, 31%	29 (100%)
4	To discuss the student's value base and its impact on their work.	0, 0%	1, 3%	5, 17%	13, 45%	10, 34%	29 (100%)
5	To give regular and constructive feedback to the student on their work.	0, 0%	0, 0%	3, 10%	10, 34%	16, 55%	29 (100%)
6	To help the student to be self-reflective about their work and interaction with clients and other staff.	0, 0%	0, 0%	4, 14%	7, 24%	18, 62%	29 (100%)

#	Question	None at all	A little	A moderate amount	A lot	A great deal	Total
7	To give the student access to opportunities to further develop knowledge and skills.	0, 0%	0, 0%	3, 10%	9, 31%	17, 59%	29 (100%)

Overall, the students were consistent in their understanding regarding the role of supervision.

Most students had a range of supervision experiences including peer supervision (n=10, 34%), group supervision (n=20, 69%) and 1:1 supervision (n=23, 28%). Supervision styles included structured supervision e.g., schedule time with the supervisor (18, 22%), informal supervision e.g., driving in the car to an appointment (n=11, 13%), almost half (n=13, 45%) of the students had developed a supervision contract with their placement supervisor with only 2 students (n=2, 7%) reporting they had no supervision.

▶ Phase Three: Pre-implementation results

This phase presents the results of the pre-survey data. This cohort of students was surveyed in August 2023, just as they were commencing placement and developing a relationship with their supervisors. When considering the role of the supervisory relationship (Table 3), students focused on the need for a supportive relationship, open-mindedness, and open communication. When evaluating the educational function of supervision, students prioritised the opportunity for self-reflection about their own work and their interactions with clients and other staff to assist in the development of their personal competence and to give regular and constructive feedback to the students on their work. Please note the results presented are combined cohorts of both BSW (n=52, 45%) and MSWQ (n=66, 54%).

Table 3: Student perception on the function of supervision

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	To validate the student both as a developing professional and as a person.	72, 61%	39, 33%	5, 4%	1 ,1%	1, 1%	118 (100%)
2	To create a safe environment for the student to reflect on their practice and its impact on them as a person.	84, 72%	30, 26%	2, 1%	0, 0%	1, 1%	117 (100%)
3	To clarify the boundaries between support and counselling and the issue of confidentiality in supervision.	60, 52%	42, 36%	12, 10%	1, 1%	1, 1%	116 (100%)
4	To debrief the student and give them permission to talk about feelings raised by their work.	82, 70%	29, 25%	5, 4%	0, 0%	1, 1%	117 (100%)

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
5	To help the student explore any emotional blocks to their work.	74, 63%	33, 28%	7, 7%	2, 1%	1, 1%	117 (100%)
6	To explore issues of difference that may be experienced by the student.	68, 59%	39, 33%	6, 5%	3, 2%	1, 1%	117 (100%)
7	To monitor the overall health and emotional functioning of the student.	59, 51%	39, 33%	11, 9%	6, 5%	2, 2%	117 (100%)
8	To clarify when the student should be advised to seek professional help.	52, 46%	41, 36%	11, 9%	7, 6%	2, 3%	113 (100%)

Of the 63 MSWQ students that responded to the question regarding supervision contracts, 44 had existing supervision contracts in place, while 21 did not in comparison to the BSW students (n=51), only 30 of whom had contracts in place.

▶ **Phase Four: The Interactive Animation**

During this phase, two IA were embedded into three Field Education Moodle sites with supporting prompts, interactions and opportunities for student engagement.

The first animation focused on Practice Standard 8: Professional Supervision and began with 'Sam the Seagull' reflecting that he felt anxious and not prepared for supervision. The IA then paused, and students were prompted to consider the reflective question: 'How did you feel before your first supervision?' (Figure 2).
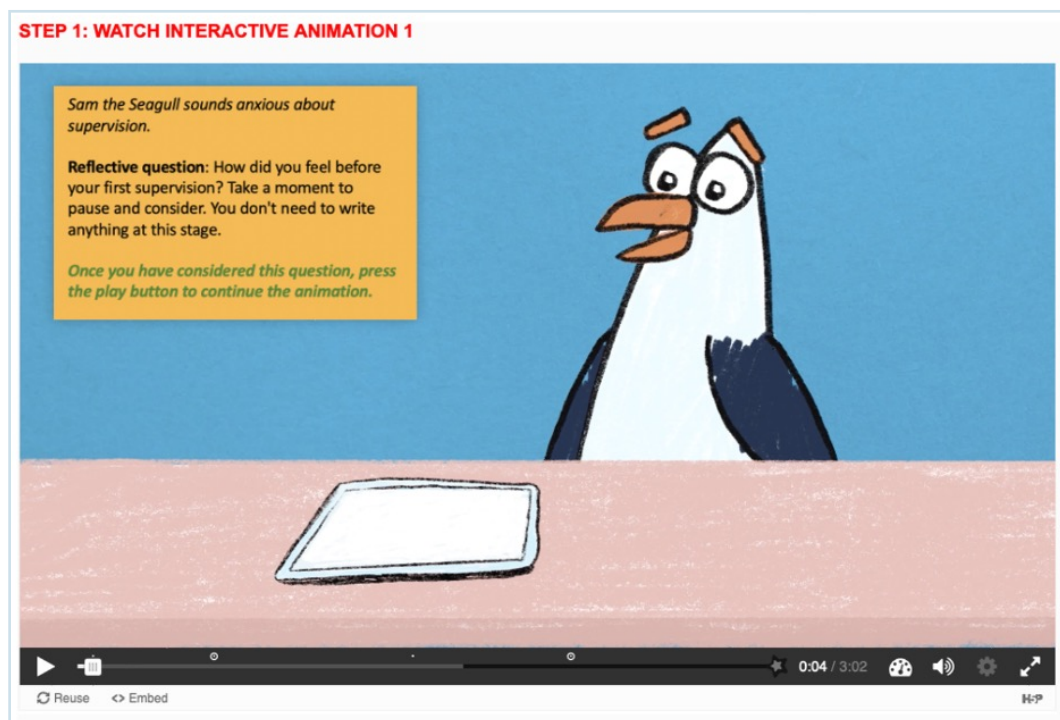

Figure 2: IA Introduction

The IA then continued with 'Sam the Seagull' remembering to read the section of the Cleak and Wilson (Cleak & Wilson, 2022c) textbook (Figure 3) on how to prepare for supervision, this was followed by information and questions inviting reflection on the supervision process (Figure 4).
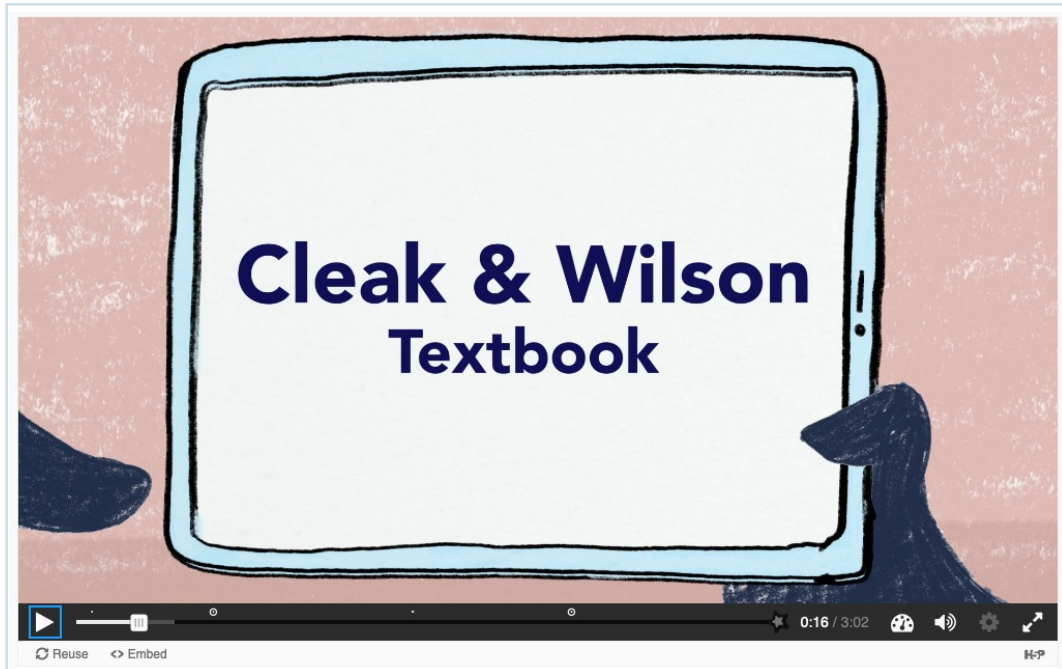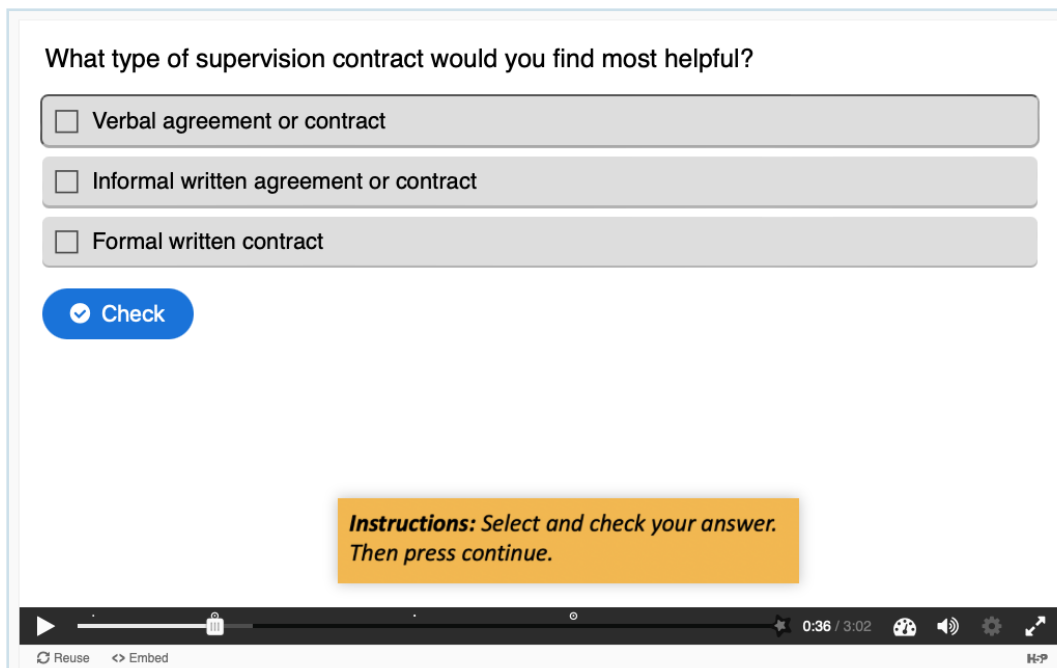

Figure 3: IA prompts students to revisit the textbook

Figure 4: IA reflective question on value of supervision

The IA then asked students to consider the role and value of a supervision contract (Figure 5) and used a scrolling action to suggest ways to prepare for supervision e.g. meeting in a quiet space, being prepared for supervision. The IA then continued for several more minutes with stops to engage students (e.g., Click the hyperlink to access Practice Standard 8: Professional Supervision, multiple-choice questions). The IA summarised the value for students to have dedicated time to reflect on developing their own social work identity. It also highlighted the value and purpose of supervision and then used reflective questions such as 'What is the purpose of supervision?' to conclude the animation.

What type of supervision contract would you find most helpful?

- [ ] Verbal agreement or contract
- [ ] Informal written agreement or contract
- [ ] Formal written contract

Check

Instructions: Select and check your answer. Then press continue.

0:36 / 3:02

Reuse   Embed

Figure 5: IA multiple-choice question to think about supervision contracts

The second IA simulated a supervision discussion between 'Oli the Owl,' a field educator, and 'Sam the Seagull,' a student, regarding the implications of Practice Standard 4: Culture, Identity and Intersectionality and Practice Standard 5: Critical Thinking in Practice. During this discussion, there was a focus on the application of critical SW theory and human rights-based approaches in a range of SW practice settings. For instance, 'Oli the Owl' introduced the theoretical concepts and then posed a reflective question to 'Sam the Seagull' which prompted students to reflect on their positionality and positional power in the agency context. Students were required to reflect on their assumptions regarding Sam's assumed gender and in doing, gained greater appreciation of their tendency to apply heteronormative stereotypes.

The final section of the second IA two, asked students to challenge their own perception of how their own body language, and the way they present themselves can convey an erroneous sense that they are the 'experts'. In this way the IA challenged students to think about their own positionality and power (Figure 7).
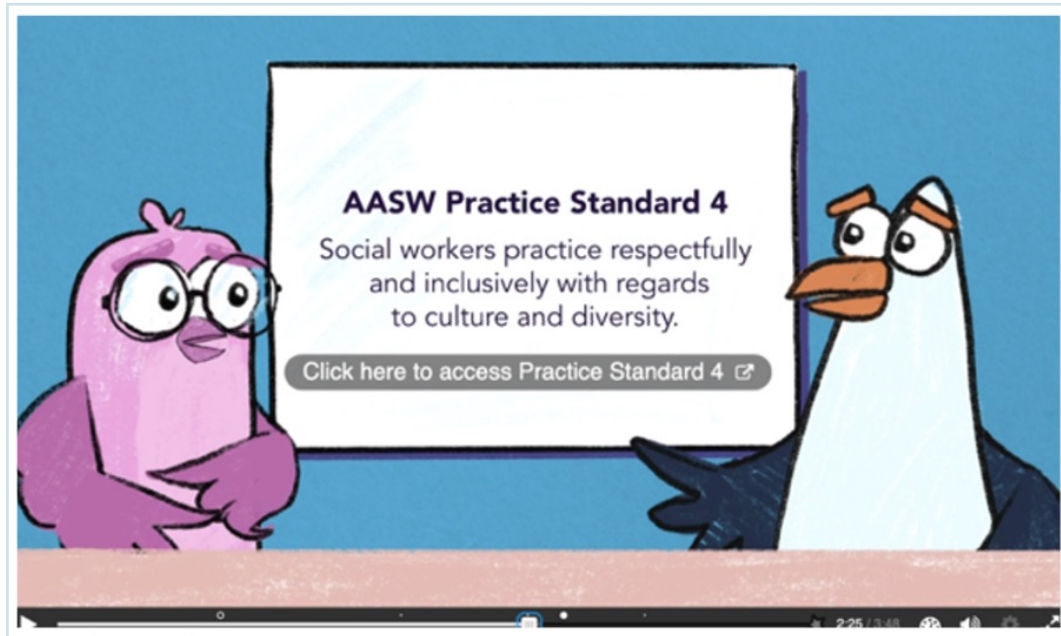
Figure 6: IA prompts Practice Standard 4

Figure 7: IA power & positionality

▶ **Phase Five: Post-implementation results**

This section presents the post-survey data (n=113) which includes both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey. The focus of this survey was to explore the IA experience, as well as asking students about their supervision experiences. As with Phase 3, the data presented included both the BSW (n=51, 45%) and MSWQ (n=62, 55%) cohorts.

Quantitative data

The focus of the post-survey was to explore the interactive animation learning experience, as well as ask students about their supervision experiences. As with Phase 3, the data presented included both the BSW (n=51, 45%) and MSWQ (n=62, 55%) cohorts. Overall, students strongly agreed (n=24, 21%) or agreed (n=56, 49%) with the statement *'the animation enhanced my understanding of supervisory relationships'*. Only 7 students stated they disagreed (4, 4%) or strongly disagreed (3, 3%) with the statement. Students strongly agreed (30, 27%) or agreed (52, 46%) that the animation helped them achieve better outcomes through self-paced learning and the interactive components also supported learning (95, 94% agree/strongly agree). Finally, three-quarters of all students agreed the animation was effective in supporting learning (85, 75%) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Learning & supervision feedback

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	The animation could help me achieve improved outcomes through self-paced learning	30, 27%	52, 46%	26, 26%	3, 3%	2, 2%	113 (100%)
2	The animation includes interactive components (e.g. responding to a multiple-choice question) that could be helpful for my learning.	38, 34%	57, 50%	14, 12%	3, 3%	1, 1%	113 (100%)
3	The animation enhanced my understanding of supervisory relationships	24, 21%	56, 49%	26, 23%	4, 4%	3, 3%	113 (100%)
4	Overall, I found the animation to be an effective format for learning.	30, 26%	55, 49%	20, 18%	5, 4%	3, 3%	113 (100%)

Qualitative data

The qualitative data analysis identified two themes (1) Stronger understanding of supervision and (2) Privilege and power relationships.

(1) Stronger understanding of supervision

A prominent theme was that supervision and placement can be perceived as overwhelming and daunting, particularly before the first placement. Two students noted the usefulness of the IA in developing their understanding of supervision and reducing anxiety:

> It helped me understand how placement supervision can be helpful and how it can help us learn and develop skills as a social worker and implement them in practice.

> By providing real examples of interactions as to how supervision can look like, it can help to ease the anxiety and nervousness that comes with attending a supervision session for the first time.

The fact that it is replayable and can be done at your own pace is quite user-friendly and person-centred. Overall, this is quite progressive and is a good step towards future learning.

One student commented: *"It was helpful in explaining what supervision should look like and its purpose"* which reflected the students' appreciation for the IA providing a better understanding of what placement supervision would entail:

It helped me understand how placement supervision can be helpful and how it can help us learn and develop skills as a social worker and implement them in practice.

It reminds me of the importance of supervision and ideas of things that could be discussed.

The animation was useful in providing a basic overall knowledge on how supervision works as well as why it is important in social work practice. It was quick and relative to all students, studying social work. The method of using animations worked well as I was able to effectively engage in the content.

The students reported on the value of the clarification provided, notably where to go for help and where to find further resources:

It helped me understand the resources I can utilise, where to find information helpful for work placement [in the textbook] and provides links to the practice standards.

It helped me understand what supervision is about, where I can go for help if I am lost, the resources I can utilise etc.

Overall, the students enjoyed the style and delivery of the IA, which made the content more accessible:

The animations were aesthetically pleasing and provided a reminder for things relating to my expectations of supervision and how to ensure it is beneficial.

The animations give a visualisation of my supervision on placement, as information is read out, I can easily understand and navigate my learning on placement.

Students shared that the IA encouraged reflection on their own practice as well as the dynamics of the spaces they work in:-

It prompted reflection on practice standards, navigating power dynamics in placement and social work practice, and the impact of cultural identity.

Reflecting on our role as social workers will help us learn and grow.

In addition, the animation inspired me to incorporate a listening-centred approach in my everyday practice, providing a platform for marginalized communities, groups, and individuals to express their needs and concerns. This aligns with the goal of challenging oppressive social and organizational structures by promoting inclusivity and social justice.

These comments aligned with the strategies shared by supervisors interviewed in the pre-intervention data collection, who agreed that supervision should include opportunities for reflective practice. Evident in the students' reflections was also their thoughts on how reflective practice can support supervision when there is uncertainty about the supervisor's style and how to navigate this part of the relationship:

Supervision can be a bit daunting at first, especially if you are still unsure of the style of teaching and supervising your supervisor takes. But if you can ensure that you bring to the table what you can (e.g., reflections, points of discussion), then you have something to talk about at least.

Help me to prepare and feel less anxious about supervision, to reflect on discussions etc.

Participants' reflections showed that the IA supported students' understandings about the practice standards:

The animation prompts you to review the AASW standards and offers other student's perspectives and opinions on supervision and what that might look like for each individual [and they] made it easier and clearer to understand the practice standards on placement.

It also provides links to the practice standards and supports students to understand the practice standards in context.

It had valuable information about the practice standards, what they mean, and how they relate to practice.

Specifically, from the student's perspective, the interactive features embedded in the animations encouraged understanding of the standards by addressing two of the standards in greater detail. Further it supported students to unpack the detail of the remaining seven standards:

The reflection questions allowed me to think through/ reflect on each practice standard discussed. The practice standards are long, wordy, and extensive. so, this animation helped me to critically reflect on the standards [and] will be helpful in writing my end-placement report.

If they were written per each standard and have it more structured this would suit me better.

Finally, one student suggested that IA could benefit neurodiverse students:

It's helpful for neurodiverse students who struggle with written instructions to have videos and interactive activities to support their learning.

(2) Privilege and power relationships

Understanding the role of privilege and power as both a social work student and a social work practitioner was a strong theme. Students may not have had an opportunity to consider their own privilege and power and several comments highlighted that having a university education and becoming a social worker was a privileged position:

> The animation was very interactive and helped me reflect on my own privilege and power. This acknowledgement of my positionality will help me work better with the clients and broaden my understanding and learnings.

> It also made me reflect on power and privilege and how being a university student already places me in a position of power.

> Is relatable and encourages reflective practice to address the impact my own culture and lived experience/privilege could impact my practice, and how supervision can be used to reflect on this.

The IA also provided clear and relatable content around power and privilege in supervision and students commented that the IA made the conversation more accessible:

> Reflecting on my professional power and personal privilege, the animation encouraged me to be aware of these dynamics in my interactions and interventions. It prompted me to question how I can use my position to empower others rather than reinforce existing inequalities.

> It was helpful in explaining about what supervision should look like and its purpose. It also prompted reflection on practice standards, navigating power dynamics in placement and social work practice, and the impact of cultural identity.

> The animations were aesthetically pleasing and provided a reminder for things relating to my expectations of supervision and how to ensure it is beneficial. It also made me reflect on power and privilege, and how being a university student already places me in a position of power.

Participants' reflections suggested that the IA were helpful for informing students about the *"different functions and approaches to supervision"*. It also reassured students that supervision should be a positive learning opportunity:

> I have often felt apprehensive about supervision due to my previous experiences. However, the animations reinforced that supervision should be a positive experience. The animations helped change how I view supervision.

Further, participants commented on the power students hold, and the impact they can make on their own supervisory experience. *"It explains the benefits of supervision and the power we hold as students. We are not as powerless as we may assume, and it's good to recognise that"*.

Discussion

This research investigated social work students' perceptions of IA in undergraduate and postgraduate Field Education placement subjects to determine their suitability for improving understanding about supervisory relationships on placement.

Recent studies, by Pinter et.al (2012) and El Hammoumi et. al (2022) suggest that IA can improve academic performance and cultivate interest in learning across a range of higher education disciplines (e.g. economics, biology, engineering & computer science). Our research expands knowledge on the effectiveness of IA for work integrated learning success, specifically in social work Field Education.

This research affirms that IA can support students in achieving better learning outcomes through their engagement with self-paced features (e.g., pause, rewind) and interactive components (e.g., reflective questioning, multiple choice questions, hyperlinks). It would appear the current study strengthens understanding about the use of animations to foster self-paced learning (Liu & Elms, 2019), as well as offering novel insights into the use of interactive components to enhance WIL. The findings reflect the importance of using interactive components to afford students the opportunity to engage in critical reflection especially around challenging content of the assessment tasks i.e., the AASW practice standards, which students reported difficulty in navigating independently. Further, the use of IA for gauging student understanding of knowledge and skills through formative assessment (e.g., multiple choice questions) and the use of hyperlinks (e.g., to the AASW practice standards), can help reduce fears around supervision and build students' self-confidence for locating support resources and achieving learning outcomes.

The current study found that the role of supervision was not always clear to students, and they were not always able to articulate or advocate for themselves with their supervisor on placement. It has been noted by Zuchowski et. al (2021), that students do not always receive the required amount of hours of supervision and it is important to equip students with advocacy skills to negotiate for themselves on placement. The use of IA could support future students with authentic work situations, to build confidence in asking questions and reduce their fears about supervision. IA use also provides the opportunity for students to engage in reflective practices as well as receive clarification regarding roles and expectations during FE.

One positive finding from this study, was the use of IA to support students' understanding of the new AASW Practice Standards (AASW, 2023). Notably, this research, focused on the recently revised practice standards including Practice Standard 8 Professional Supervision and Practice Standard 9: Professional Growth, however there were also links to critical social work theory (Pease et al., 2020). The research found that the animation created a unique opportunity for conversations around privilege and associated power, encouraging reflective practice and enhancing understanding about the role of social work and personal privilege and power.

The research findings indicated that social work students valued the IA content, found it context-specific and informative. IA as a pedagogical approach promotes interaction through self-reflection, fosters self-confidence and builds autonomy.

Strengths & Limitations

To our knowledge this the only study using IA in this way, working with social work students on placement. There are limited studies describing the use of IA in the literature and this study provided a new and novel approach to using IA to support teaching and learning.

The research study was limited as it presents the students' perspective through an online pre-post implementation survey, with no capacity to explore the supervisory relationship through interviews. Another limitation included the fact that we were unable to obtain follow-up feedback from the social work practitioners post implementation. As the survey was anonymous, we were not able to link the data, so limited comparison between groups could be made.

We acknowledge there were limitations in the way the post-implementation data was collected i.e. immediately after the students watched it during the final seminar. A stronger future evaluation method would include pre- and post-implementation of IA where the IA was watched by students' preplacement. Then students could be surveyed at either mid-placement or end-of-placement about how their engagement with the IA during the pre-placement seminar influenced their approach to and engagement with supervision during their placement.

Conclusion

The role of supervision in social work Field Education is fundamental in linking students' theory to practice. Integral to the success of the Field Education placement is the relationship between the student and the supervisor. The use of IA can be one of the many tools used to integrate the theory and practice on placement. The findings highlighted that the supervision relationship can be supported using IA to engage students in the very important step of building an ongoing practice of supervision that will support them into their future careers. Future studies could explore the role of IA as bridging tool to support social work student learning on placement, with a range of modules covering different aspects of social work education.

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