

Advances in Simulation-based Social Work Education Specializing in Children and Families

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Background and Purpose

Social work is an applied profession. The ability to effectively teach practical skills and evaluate student competence is central to the critical role university based professional programs have in training and preparing the future social service work force. This research project is aimed at:

- 1) Evaluating the effectiveness of using simulation as a teaching and learning modality in social work education, and
- 2) Understanding how students reflect and conceptualize their practice with children and families.

What is Simulation-based Learning?

Simulation refers to a process of enacting a practice scenario with the use of standardized actors, virtual clients, and/or staged environment, in a consistent, deliberate, and standardized manner.

Students can practice their social work skills in a way that mimics ‘real life’ situations. Participation in simulation can help social work students understand complex and dynamic worker-client interactions, and reflect in and on their practice.

Vignettes

Three child maltreatment scenarios involving a Chinese family, Indigenous family, and White youth were developed and tested for face validity with subject matter experts. Standardized client actors were trained to portray the characters in the child maltreatment scenarios.

In-Class Simulation

Methods

Thirty-one (N=31) BSW and MSW social work students participated in a three-hour voluntary child welfare simulation workshop. An online mixed-methods survey was administered to collect data about their learning experience. A theoretically-informed mixed methods approach guided the research. Quantitative data were analyzed using Fisher’s exact test and independent samples T-test, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

Results

Figure 1. Differences in Simulation Scenarios

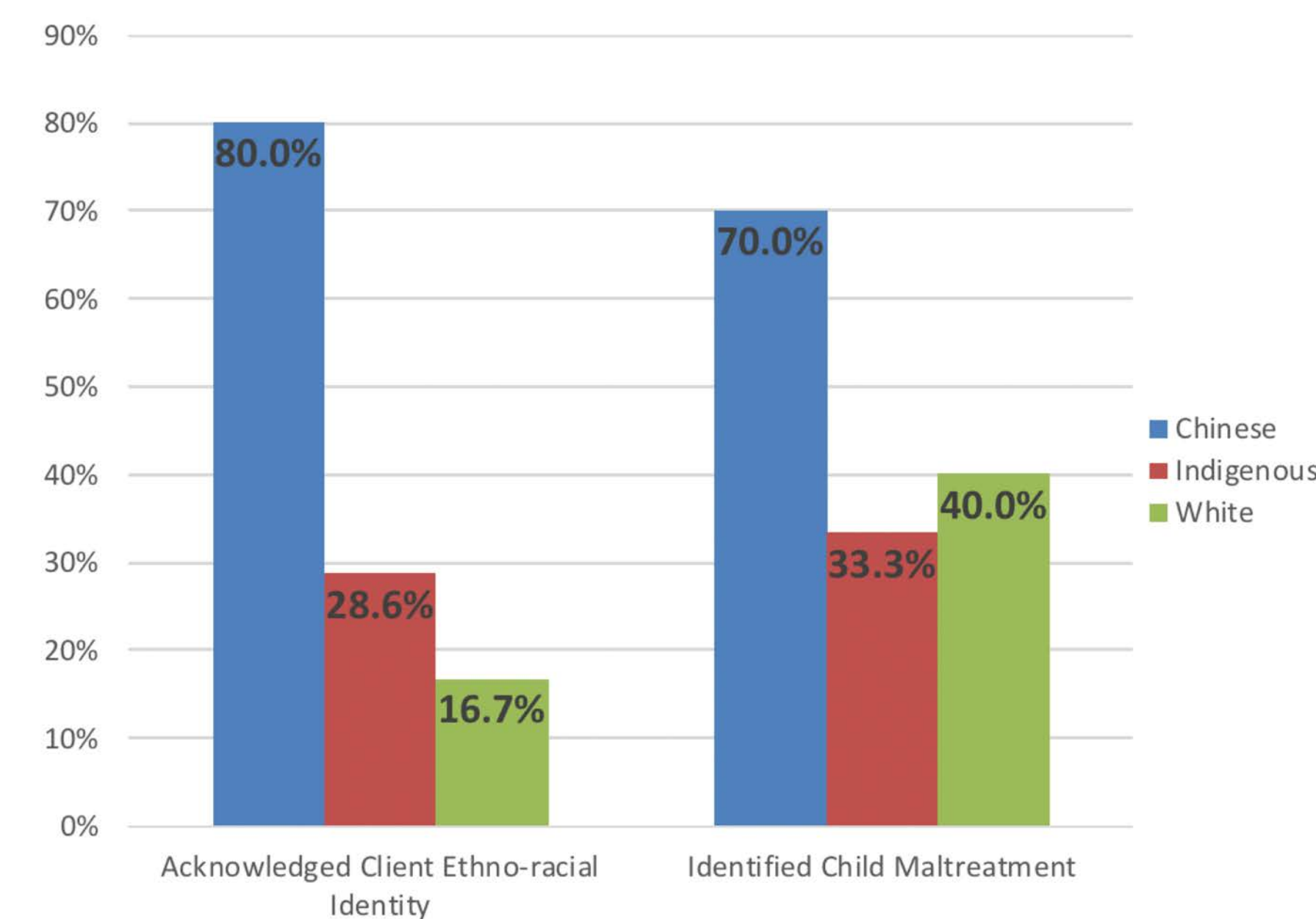


Figure 2. Learning Outcomes of Participants based on Whether they Acknowledged Client’s Ethno-racial Identity during the Simulation

	Acknowledged Client(s) Ethno-racial Identity		
	Yes	No	Sig.
Beneficial to Learning	5.00	4.75	*
More Beneficial than Peer Role-Play	5.00	4.65	*
Supportive Facilitator Guidance	4.91	4.58	*
Professional Judgement	4.00	3.50	*
Self-awareness	4.91	4.58	*
Interviewing Skills	4.55	4.00	*
Asking Open-ended Questions	4.55	3.83	*
Managing Resistance	4.18	3.58	*

Virtual Simulation

The virtual simulation was developed and tested over two phases:

Phase 1: Initial Development and Testing

Six (N=6) participants piloted the virtual simulation. All participants felt that the simulation was useful and helped them consider their skills. All participants agreed or strongly agreed that the virtual simulation was better than a case study and discussion learning modality. However, the majority of participants preferred in-class simulation due to its interactive participatory learning and facilitator feedback for skills development.

Phase 2: Expanded Application and Refinement

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Children and Families Development (MCFD) and three universities in BC requested access and usage of the virtual simulation as a replacement and/or supplement for practicum placement learning hours. During the 2020-2021 academic year, there were 188 trials of the virtual simulation. Current data analysis is underway to examine the decision-making and service delivery patterns with the virtual simulation. Interviews with instructors will provide insight to the utility of the educational platform.

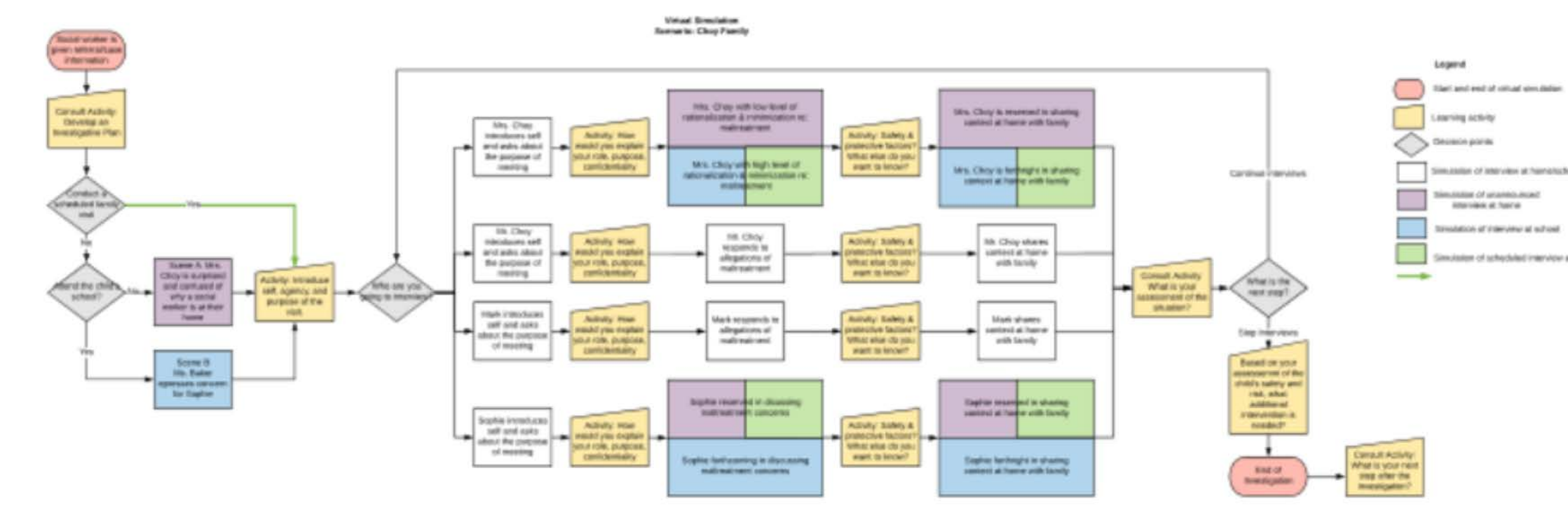
Implication and Conclusion

In the midst of a global pandemic, social work educators need to guide and equip future social workers to be competent and agile in the everchanging world. Child welfare competence in social work education can be enhanced through simulation-based learning. While in-class simulations are optimal, virtual simulation offers a cost-effective and sustainable pedagogical tool to teach direct practice in an online or blended learning format that is suitable for on-campus or distance education.

Filming the Videos for Virtual Simulation



Pathways for a Virtual Simulated Child Protection Investigation with the Choy Family



In-class Simulation

A student interviewing Ms. Wilson during a child protection investigation with allegations of child neglect.

