**Reflection and Metaphor as an Empowering Approach for** **E-learning in Challenging Situations: The case of Experiential Learning During the Covid-19 Outbreak**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of students who transitioned to online group facilitation during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research questions explored: a) students’ thoughts and feelings regarding online group facilitation during the pandemic; b) students’ coping strategies for dealing with online group facilitation; c) the use of reflection and metaphor to mitigate the challenges of a difficult experience.

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**introduction**

As in many countries around the world, higher education institutions in Israel moved classes online during the COVID-19 outbreak. The shift to online learning posed a unique challenge for instructors that teach classes and workshops that combine theory and practice, since this kind of experiential learning is closely tied to in person human interaction such as relationship building and group dynamics. Building on the case of a course aimed at preparing undergraduate Social Work students to facilitate group interventions in the department of social work at the Yezreel Valley College, this qualitative study explores the experiences and perceptions of students who transitioned to online group facilitation during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. This course is designed to guide students to be proficient in theory and practice by combining formal learning with experiential components.

To respond to the challenges involved in shifting the course online, the authors, who were among the instructors of the course at the time, used reflection and metaphor as a framework for an assignment to prepare and empower students for the challenging task of group facilitation. There is abundant research regarding the use of reflection to guide student education in practice learning in many professions (Schön, 1983; 1987) as well as a body of research regarding the use of reflection in social work practice. However, most of the literature relates to the process of reflection-on-action that takes place after an activity is finished or reflection-in action which occurs when the activity is being done, or reflection-for- action concentrates on analyzing the outcomes of the first two and formulating conclusions for future practice. Few studies have examined the process of reflection-before-action, and none have done so in the context of social work studies. The research questions explored: a) students’ thoughts and feelings regarding online group facilitation during the pandemic; b) students’ coping strategies for dealing with online group facilitation; c) the use of reflection and metaphor to mitigate the challenges of a difficult experience.

**Theoretical Background**

The Impact of Covid-19 on Students in Higher Education

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, on December 12, 2019, and the World Health Organization's (2020) declaration of a pandemic caused by the coronavirus, the realities of life of millions of people worldwide have changed. Governments have declared a state of emergency and adopted a series of stringent measures to promote physical distancing, people were instructed to isolate themselves from others, and neighborhoods, cites, or entire districts were quarantined to break the contagion chain. In a recent review on the implications of lockdowns, Brooks et al. (2020) reported negative psychological effects, some evolving into post-traumatic symptoms. Moreover, at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, Wang et al. (2020) and Cao et al. (2020) found that Chinese residents experienced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress at medium to high intensity.

Students in universities and colleges had to face distinct challenges due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Aristovik and his colleagues (Aristovnik et, al. 2020) conducted a comprehensive large-scale study of student's perceptions regarding the impacts of the first wave of COVID-19 that included data from 62 countries around the world of. Their findings suggest that the pandemic has severely impacted students in higher education institutions. Some major changes in most academic institutions around the world and in Israel include the switch to online lectures, the closing of libraries and labs, change in communications with faculty and staff, and new assessment methods. This compelled students to adapt their daily practices regarding academic work and life quickly. These changes also effected student's social life as many needed to move back to their parents' home, to limit interaction with friends, colleagues and relatives. Students also needed to face the financial repercussions of the lockdown due to job loss and current as well as future career implications. The pandemic has promoted some positive changes in habits and mindsets such as paying greater attention to personal hygiene, taking care of personal health and family health and taking up physical exercise (Aristovnik et, al.l 2020).

Israel was one of the first countries that declared a total nationwide lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19. On March 17, 2020, members of households in Israel were ordered to stay together at home with no time limit and were permitted to go outside for essential activities only (Israel Ministry of Health, 2020). Findings from a survey conducted by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics at the end of the first lockdown, indicate that about one-fourth of the adult population sustained a decline in psychological well-being, about one-third reported increased stress and anxiety, and one-fifth reported loneliness, depression, and tension within family relationships (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In an on-line survey, Israeli students reported that they were concerned about a family member or a friend contracting COVID-19 even more than being infected themselves. Israeli students were concerned with the worldwide spread of the pandemic as well as the ambiguous nature of the emergency state declared by the Israeli government to contain the pandemic and the restrictive measures that followed. The most vulnerable groups were female students, Arab-Palestinian students and students who were isolated due to viral exposure at the time of the survey (Schiff et all., 2020). For social work students in particular, physical distancing measures and other restrictions may have had a greater impact as they disrupted field placement, which is a fundamental pedagogy in social work. It also suspended in-person class training, which is considered the best pedagogy for teaching practice competencies ([Kourgiantakis](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Kourgiantakis%20T%5BAuthor%5D) and Lee, 2020). In Israel, like in many countries, some practice settings where social work students are trained, as part of the regular curriculum, were unable to supervise students or had to make extensive changes or move to remote learning ([Canadian Association for Social Work Education](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7539229/#bibr2-0020872820959706)  [CSWE, 2020](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7539229/#bibr4-0020872820959706)).

Teaching group intervention for social work students

Group intervention is one of the main methods in social work practice and an integral element in many therapeutic interventions [(Birnbaum and Auerbach, 1994](https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.yvc.ac.il/stable/pdf/23042947.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A923e2c85a31b3681eed522697da0d217)). Most of the literature regarding teaching group work and group intervention to social work students underscores the significance of combining class work with experiential learning (Clements, 2007; [Tolman & Molidor, 1994](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1080/01609510801981391)). Guided by experiential learning theory, this approach suggests that students who acquire knowledge, skills, and values in the classroom carry this knowledge to their future practice (Kolb, 2015). Thus, combining experiential learning with traditional didactic pedagogy improves students awareness to group processes and dynamics, moving them from just understanding the theory to being able to use it in a group settings ([Birnbaum, 1984](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1080/01609510801981391); [Gitterman, 1988; Yalom & Lcszcz, 2020)](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1080/01609510801981391). [Berger (1996)](https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.haifa.ac.il/doi/full/10.1080/01609510801981391) identified four methods of teaching group work: didactic, observation, experiential participation, and experiential group leadership. The factors that help determine what methods should be chosen for teaching group skills include: the phase in which the students are in their professional education, the size of the class, the class composition, availability of observable groups, student's learning style, the length of the course, the instructor's professional philosophy and the institutional mission. With all these considerations in mind, the department of social work at YVC regularly merges various teaching technics that incorporate all four methods at different stages of the course. Following Knight's (Knight, 2000) notion of the group as a laboratory, in this course student interchange their rolls as group members, group observers, didactic instructors and group co-facilitators. This allows the group to act as a laboratory in which different ideas, dynamics, relationships, processes and group rolls be explored.

One of the most important rolls that are tought and explored in this group setting is the role of group facilitator. Teaching how to facilitate a group can be challenging for instructors to teach and for students to learn. The facilitator's role involves many responsibilities such as creating basic conditions to ensure a secure base from which the group can develop and attain its goals (Yalom & Lcszez????). In order to obtain the capacity to succeed in facilitating a group, students must learn several skills that are unique to group work. For example, the skill of group monitoring, which entails the ability to tune in and observe individual members as well as the collective group. Other core skills include the ability to reflect the mutual aid orientation of group work and involve the facilitator's ability to connect the individual to the group and the group to the individual members by reframing an individual member’s comments, behaviors, and experiences in ways that resonate with the rest of the group (Knight, 2014).

With the sudden shift to online learning during the first wave of COVID-19, both students and instructors were flung into on-line learning and had to adapt to an unfamiliar pedagogy in the midst of a global pandemic which threatened their own and their relative's well-being. This obliged instructors to incorporate educational methods that were not previously used in the course and adapt existing tolls to promote effective student learning.

The Use of Reflection and Metaphor in Social Work Education

The term ‘reflective practice’ is used to describe the way in which professionals in various fields work in an intuitive, spontaneous, and appropriate manner to improve results (Ong, 2011; Schön, 1982). According to Boud (2010) reflective practice is especially suitable for practical professions such as nursing and teaching. Social workers are also considered ‘reflective practitioners’, in the sense that social workers engage in ‘meaning creation’ by constructing exemplary themes through their case experiences, rather than applying general principles to individual cases (Schon, 1991a, 1991b; Tse Fong Leung, \*\*\*\*). The framework of reflective practice regards professionals as artists who acknowledge ambivalence in scientific knowledge (Taylor & White, 2000) and adopt a ‘knowledge as process’ paradigm (Sheppard, 1995) to inform their practice (Sheppard et al., 2000). Thus, reflective learning, as a process of meaning making embedded in experience, can be seen as a response to uncertainty and unpredictability, which characterize the environment in which many social workers practice (Tse Fong Leung, \*\*\*\*). Ong (2011) suggested that true education should help students develop inner reflective capabilities. In this educational tradition, the teacher is not merely the supplier of facts and formal knowledge but teaches how to approach the shifting complexities of situations that are new, unknown or unique.

Schön's model of reflection (1983; 1987) is based on three processes: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action. The process of reflection-on-action takes place after an activity is finished; reflection-in action occurs when the activity is being done, and the last process of reflection-for- action concentrates on analyzing the outcomes of the first two and formulating conclusions for future actions (Schön 1987). Edwards (2017) proposed the use of reflection-before-action to prepare nursing students for challenging situations. Reflection-before-action involves reflection before entering into clinical practice work. In a nursing educational setting reflection-before-action is used to refer to students’ expression of emotions with respect to past experiences before entering into simulation. Alden and Durham (2012) suggest this process is necessary for students to examine previous knowledge and experiences, understand the task at hand, relieve anxieties, and as a means for briefing about the patient.

However, the use of reflection in the educational that centers on the development of the student as a person and not merely in his or her professional capacity, requires a deep understanding of the nature of human awareness. Reflection is rooted in beliefs and perceptual frameworks that are mostly out of the realm of awareness (Clark & Peterson, 1986). These belief systems inform student’s thinking and actions, so it is important that instructors assist students in developing greater awareness of their personal belief systems and their perceptual frameworks as they influence their thoughts and actions. In the context of group work, reflection requires student's awareness to the roles they take within the group setting, the roles other group members take, their responses to group dynamic and the how these are based on personal deep-rooted beliefs. One path toward heightening students' awareness of their implicit belief systems involves focusing on the metaphors and images they use as they describe their instructor role (Marshal, 1990).

The “cognitive theory of metaphor” defines metaphors as mental constructs that link the projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema (the target domain of the metaphor). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit that the human conceptual system is structured metaphorically and that metaphors are pervasive in human thought processes and language. Therefore, metaphors not only construct the way humans perceive situations, but also influence their actions (Marshall [1990](https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.yvc.ac.il/article/10.1007/s10956-010-9263-2#ref-CR16)). Gibbs (1994) outlines three main reasons for using a metaphor: to provides a way to express difficult ideas in the simpler language; to provide a compact means of expressing a lot of information in a compressed sentence; and to help capture an experience by providing a lively and detail rich expression. The analysis of metaphors encourages insights into unconscious elements of human awareness that tend to remain hidden in other forms of discourse (Kupferberg???).

The metaphorical language is especially suited for stressful experiences in times of crisis as it provides distance, identification and psychological projection that encourage people to reveal painful emotions. In difficult situations, the use of metaphors may also normalize emotional responses to unexpected situations and provide alternatives to deal with dilemmas and conflicts (Webb, 1991).

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The literature in the field of group intervention presents diverse uses of metaphors to understand group processes in both practice and education. The use of metaphors in group discourse was found to be effective since it allows group members to understand and recognize the emotional experience shared by other group members, without the need to explicitly share it (Duffy, 2005). Although there are clinical studies that use metaphor in the field of group work, a study that utilizes metaphors to specifically focus on the role of group facilitator or leader are yet to be conducted.

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of students who transitioned to online group facilitation during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research questions explored: a) students’ thoughts and feelings regarding online group facilitation during the pandemic; b) students’ coping strategies for dealing with online group facilitation; c) the use of reflection and metaphor to prepare students when facing a difficult experience.

The research is based on case study methodology (Yin, 1993; Stake, 1995). A case study is an in-depth examination of the, where researchers seek to increase their understanding of the phenomena studied (Johansson, 2002). The underlying assumption of this method is that case studies are essential for the development of social sciences (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991; Flyvbjerg, 2006). A case study is the main study design used by researchers to study complex phenomena (Richardson, 1993), and is useful for both generating and testing hypotheses (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (2001), characterizes case study as inductive because it presents the data of the situation regardless of hypotheses, allows for the expression of a lot of sensitivity, the ability to diagnose and express complex situations from different points of view and its content is mostly descriptive. Dayan (2003) argues that a system of case studies is preferred when investigating contemporary phenomenon in their natural environment and when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not entirely clear. It is possible to distinguish between three types of case study: an internal case study that serves as a way to become deeply acquainted with the specific case in order to stand on its nature and understand it better; an instrumental case study is carried out not only to understand the case itself, but also to gain more insight about a specific topic; and a collective case study which gathers a number of specific cases, by which general insights are revealed.

Ethical approval was obtained from YVC’s ethics committee. Data were gathered using a sample from reflective texts derived from students' assignments(N=16). Reflective methods (Schön,1983) have been applied in the past to help social work students perform and learn during health threats such as a pandemic (Tse Fong Leung et al., 2007). These Reflection-before-Action assignments were designed to encourage students to connect with past experiences before performing a new task and to deepen their understanding of professional practices (Edwards, 2017). The texts were analyzed using thematic analysis. In coding, we looked for commonalities and divergences, as well as descriptive analyses of the students’ experiences. Metaphor analysis was conducted using an interpretive approach whereby each researcher analyzed the data independently before establishing a shared coding scheme (Kupferberg, 2008; 2016).

**Findings**

Three major themes emerged from data analysis: moving towards the challenge, managing the challenge, and reframing the challenge.

Moving Towards the Challenge

The first theme, moving towards the challenge, relates to student's thoughts and feelings regarding the sudden shift to online learning. Study participants described a general sense of stress and uncertainty. However, for the most part they could also recognize the learning opportunity. In the following example, a student reflects about her feelings regarding the unexpected virtual challenge as opposed to the task she has previously prepared for

I have mixed emotions. on the one hand, for the most part, I am not anxious about speaking to an audience... We did that last year and it was a good experience for me. However, now, this will be totally different, and I am concerned that I might not be able to be on top of it.

This caused physical as well as mental stress, as this participant illustrated:

*My abdomen and chest are contracting, I don’t breathe. There are parts of me that have joy, curiosity, and adventure… there are parts of anxiety that overwhelm me, insecurity and crying, sadness. Why do I need to deal will all that?*

Other study participants described the challenges, but also identified what they saw as an advantage that this challenge may provide. In the following quote, a student identified how going virtual may help her deal with her fear of exposure:

I think that the virtual facilitation is unusual. Absolutely no experience in this… could rise new fears. However, I see this as a unique opportunity to experience this. It helps me reduce the fear that my stress and anxiety will be exposed to the group because there is less emphasis on body language in this kind of facilitation because only the torso is visible.

In moving online. study participants explained that the perception of reality was compromised. Specifically, they referred to what they can or cannot see and how this might change or even distort their perception of what is actually happening. For example, one study participant said: *"When you teach through a computer, it's not like face to face. There are things you can't see. Things that can be missed"*. Another study participants went on to describe how she doubted her ability to succeed in virtual group facilitation, because of how she might misinterpret reality

In class I can see everyone and notice their level of attention, but online it's very difficult, and it's impossible to discern whether everyone is really attentive and cooperative**- it is not possible to know this through** a camera which… does not really reflect reality. So, I am concerned about my success to facilitate [the group].

The feelings and thoughts students described in reflecting about their situation as they must perform a challenging task during the first wave of the pandemic brought about self-doubt and insecurity. For example, a study participant expressed her fear of failing class because of the shift to screens: *"I am scared of failing. Not passing the screen test. Literally. People are framed in black squares, and the squares are changing, and I can't follow where everyone is"*. Another participant expressed doubt in her ability to understand the task at hand: *"Another thing that is hard for me and raises concern is my ability to understand the assignment and the guidelines. I'm afraid I may not understand the assignment right and do things wrong"*. Another source of insecurity related to student's ability to relate to and engage their peers, as this student reiterated: "*I'm not sure I know how you can encourage people to cooperate through screens… I'm not sure to what extent I will be successful in deeply understanding someone's feelings and maybe also in expressing mine"*.

The stress and anxiety created by the need to perform a demanding task in a difficult situation required students to manage the challenge so that they can cope successfully.

Managing the Challenge

The second theme, managing the challenge, pertains to student's reflections before action, which was the task of group facilitation with another student. The study participants described three main coping strategies which they reflected upon in preparation for this task. Although each strategy is distinct, some student's reflections combine several strategies.

The first strategy refers to task-oriented solutions that requires practical planning by the participant and use of their individual strengths. In the following example, a participant reflects upon possible solutions for her technological hesitation:

*In order to cope with the task of facilitating and the technological difficulty, I can try to prepare in advance, learn and get to know the Zoom app before facilitating and even make [Zoom] calls with acquaintances and family members to practice.*

Another student reflected on a potential way to overcome the challenge of active participation online: "*I think it would be best for me and my co-facilitator to invite our group members to participate every time.*

The second strategy students described relied on support from student's peers, either the co-facilitator or other group members. For example, the following quate by a study participant who talked about the importance of building a relationship with her co=facilitator to overcome the challenge:

*Things that can help me cope with the facilitation task, first and foremost I think a good connection with my co-facilitator. We are not friends, and it can be said that we have not even connected before except for this assignment that we get to do together… I do think that a good connection and mutual understanding could definitely help*

Another study participant reflected on the group's past experiences before the move to online class and described the support the group might be able to give her even if she finds difficulty when preforming the task:

*We are acquainted with the group since the beginning of the year, so its not a new group and new people. It is likely that this acquaintance will bring cooperation and understanding on the part of the group members even if my facilitation encounters problems. Thinking about their support and the fact that I will do everything in my power to overcome the technological difficulty helps me approach this position more relaxed.*

Reframing the Challenge

Lastly, the strategy of reframing the challenge refers to the way students gave new meaning to the stressful situation in which they had to perform the task. As students reflected on the expected challenge most study participants went through a process of reframing. In the following quate a study participant gives new meaning to the shift to virtual learning, viewing it as an exceptional occurrence instead of a threat: *"I think experiencing virtual group facilitation is unconventional…I see it as a once-in-a-lifetime experience"*. Another study participant reframed the challenge by giving a more future oriented meaning to online group facilitation, as she described this move as the innovative direction for the future of education:

*I find this is a tremendous opportunity here for meaningful learning.... it's the direction the world is advancing to, someone who won't know how to be flexible and adapt… could stay behind. So even if I'm not a big tech fan, I embrace this challenge with love and joy.*

Although all the students were asked to explore the use metaphors in their reflection before action assignment, not all were successful and \*\*\* out of \*\*\*\* did not do so. However, metaphor making was often used when students engaged in reframing the challenge. In the following example, a study participant illustrated how she gives new meaning to her role as a facilitator during the pandemic using the metaphor of a butterfly which brings calmness to the stressful situation:

*When I think about a metaphor that will describe me as a facilitator, I imagine a butterfly that for me symbolizes calm, space and color as it flows around, moving here and there, till it finds the flower of leaf that it sits comfortably on doing its work.*

Other study participants also used metaphors that reflect their stress, while reframing the situation in ways that emphasize their inner strengths. In the following example, the study participant generates a comforting figure that supports her from within using the metaphor of an old person –

*I see myself as an old figure with gray hair and a beard, many wrinkles adorn his face. His body sturdy yet fragile, his movements gentle yet confident, his gaze is piercing. He has lived here for many years, with ancient knowledge of the wisdom of nature, animals, the earth and humans. He knows their language. He encompasses both feminine and masculine elements that are balanced within him… he knows each feeling and has a unique way of seeing people without emotional entanglement… he is self-aware and knows his advantages, powers, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities. He is here to guide me. It makes me happy. He is a part of me.*

In this metaphor, the development of a comforting and reaffirming inner figure creates new meaning to the experience that reframes the stressful situation and highlights positive emotions and a sense of empowerment that may support the student when preforming the task.

Metaphors were also used to illustrate how students wish to perform the task. In the following metaphor a study participant illustrated how she viewed the process of co-facilitating the group: *I would like me and my co-facilitator to be like a pipe that carries water so that we can succeed in leading the conversation but also allow group members to lead the discussion.*

In the framework of reflection before action, this metaphor sheds light on this participant's expectations and by doing so support the preparation for the joint task.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of students who transitioned to online group facilitation during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on the case of social work students in Israel, we explored student's reflection-before-action to understand a) students’ thoughts and feelings regarding online group facilitation during the pandemic; b) students’ coping strategies for dealing with online group facilitation; c) the use of reflection and metaphor to mitigate the challenges of a difficult experience.

The study findings suggest that as students moved towards the unexpected challenge of on-line group facilitation, they expressed a general sense of stress and uncertainty which presented itself both physically and emotionally. This finding corresponds with the research regarding emotional stress and well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak (\*\*\*\*\*\*\*) that points to what Horesh and Brown dub "a new kind of mass trauma" (Horesh and Brown, 2020). Indeed, the findings from this study indicate that the stress created by the outbreak and the restrictions that followed intensified feelings of self-doubt and insecurity and a sense of compromised perception of reality. To cope with this situation student's strategies for managing the challenge centered around task-oriented solutions that requires individual practical planning or asking for support from their fellow group members. (What Lit deals with this…?). Finally, most study participants were able to construct new meaning for the stressful situation, using metaphors to reframe the challenge and mitigate the difficulties associated with it. Marshall (1990) proposed metaphors can be used with student teachers as a heuristic device to increase reflection and to encourage reconceptualization of problem situations. The findings of this study suggest that the use of metaphors could be applied not only to reflect on past problems, but also to reframe future situations that are expected to heighten anxiety and stress. In this sense, the use of metaphors in combination with reflection-before-action may be an effective tool for instructors who wish to empower students to succeed even when they feal overwhelmed.

Antonovsky’s Salutogenic paradigm (Antonovsky, 1987 \*\*\*\*) for the study of health offers a theoretical framework that sheds light to the current study findings. Unlike the popular pathogenic paradigm, that assumes the normal order of things is healthy homeostasis in which people do not confront physical or mental distress, Salutogenesis is based on a fundamentally different philosophical assumption about the world. Salutogenesis posits that human environment by its nature is full of stressors and that stress cannot be avoided. This means that the normal state of humans is one of entropy, disorder, and disruption of homeostasis. It is basically unsound and continuously attacked by disruptions that cannot be prevented. Antonovsky developed the sense of coherence (SOC) construct to conceptualize and operationalize this idea (Antonovsky, 1979). Sense of coherence (SOC) reflects the capability to cope with stressful situations. The cognitive aspect of SOC is the comprehensibility component, meaning the extent to which the stimuli deriving from the internal and external environments are structured, predictable, and explicable. This indicates how much the world is perceived as ordered and the problems facing people are clear to them. The COVID-19 outbreak has made our lives highly unpredictable and perhaps even more so to some than others. Student may be positioned in a relatively more compromising situation due to economic and other stressorsציטוט . In their reflections, study participants referred to this unpredictability. However, most could also structure it differently to heighten their sense of coherence. The instrumental aspect of SOC is formulated as manageability which refers to the extent to which people understands the problem and believe they have the needed resources to cope with it successfully. This may mean that they have either resource under their control, but it may also refer to resources controlled by others upon whom they can count. High manageability means having a sense that with the using your own resources or with the help of others, one is capable of successfully handling a difficult situation. The current study findings show that reflection-before-action was instrumental in raising student's awareness to their own resources and those of others that may be able to support them. This finding is significant for the understanding of reflection as an educational method. Not only does reflection help develop better professional capabilities (\*\*\*\*\*) it can also help students and develop concrete solutions and the mental capacity to manage problem situations. The meaningfulness component of Antonovskys's SOC model refers to the ability to find meaning in everyday events as well as problem situations. Being high on meaningfulness implies that a person feels that life makes sense emotionally and that at least some of the problems and demands in life are worthy of coping, commitment, and engagement (Sagy, Eriksson and Braun-Lewensohn, 2015). In reflection-before-action many study participants constructed new meaning to the situation and used metaphors to support coping mechanisms.

The study's findings have several implications for teaching at the Academy. Implications for pedagogy point to the effectiveness of reflection-before-action and metaphor making as tool for students in practice professions, and specific to social work students, to understand their inner world in order to consolidate their professional identity. To understand suffering, pain, the meaning of life, students need to discover their personal values and belief system. Moreover, from an ethical point of view, familiarity and understanding of the personal belief system may help students view their actions more critically and identify situations in which they impose their values on service users or how shared values benefit relationship building. The need to realize this principle of self-development increases in the face of accelerated changes that resent the world uncertain, unstable and complex. For educators and instructor, the use of student's texts vis-à-vis reflection-before-action may support a deep and nuanced understand of the needs of the students, which is valuable in planning curriculum.

This study joins previous research evidence that indicates that in a reality of global pandemics, political turmoil and impending environmental crisis increase in uncertainty the stress levels are on the rise. This is expected to affect not only traditionally vulnerable populations such as the elderly or poor, but also the student populations. It is thefor incumbent upon academic leadership to recognize this threat and serve as a community base for students. Researchers describe communal resilience as a major factor in dealing with emergencies, national crises in general, and epidemics in particular (Chandra et al., 2011). The development of community resilience is not solely dependent on government and national policy, but rather it is manifested primarily at the community level. Hadar and her colleagues (Hadar, Ergas, Alpert & Ariav, 2020) suggest that Study programs should incorporate social-emotional competencies in their curriculum that can improve their sense of well-being. If this is not done, they warn that the cycle of stress and lack of coping may become a long-term problem for students in their professional and personal lives. Tse Fong Leung and colleagues (\*\*\*\*) studied social work student's reflections in light of the threat of the SARS pandemic in Hong Kong. Specifically with regards to social work pedagogy, they propose that "where risks are unpredictable, it is important for a reflective social worker to embrace the inevitable risk, to summon the courage needed to face uncertainty, to reflect on their practice by drawing on experiential knowledge of clients, and to be accountable for their decisions". To accomplish that, they highlight the importance of academic education and training that develops the student as a person rather than simply focusing on his or her professional skills. As students will have to practice as professionals in a risk society, fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity this seems crucial (Tse Fong Leung, \*\*\*\*).

This study has a number of limitations: first, although Covid-19 constitutes a very specific global

crisis and may have specific characteristics that cannot be indicative of other kinds of student related stress. Second, this study focuses on students in onecollege course, and therefor might not necessarily be representative. Third, it is important to note that there were differences between students with respect to family status, religion, culture, age, financial situation and other aspects of life. The data in this research did not allow a deeper analysis of these differences with respect to the research questions. Future research should explore these differences both in qualitative and quantitative methods.

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