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# Evaluating iPad Use in the Field for Social Service Worker Gerontology Students

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## Evaluating iPad use in the Field for Social Service Worker Gerontology Students



### INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Elder Research has a history of exploring innovative technology use to improve the day-to-day lives of older adults and their families.

The Social Service Worker-Gerontology (SSW-G) program at Sheridan College mandates a total of 600 practicum hours to be completed in the field, and was looking for a way to integrate technology more formally into the program.

Together, the SSW-G program coordinator and the Centre staff designed an eight-week project exploring the effectiveness of the iPad as a tool for SSW-G students in the field, particularly as it affected the student's interactions with older adults and supported their learning outcomes. The use of the LifeTimesTALK app (designed for reminiscence with older adults) was encouraged as part of the Centre's separate research partnership with LifeTimes.

### METHODOLOGY

A total of 29 students were recruited from the SSW-G program on a volunteer basis. The students received an iPad and stylus and, after an orientation meeting, were asked to use the iPad at their practicum three times a week for eight weeks and to journal their experiences weekly. A follow-up debriefing meeting was held at the end of the project.

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### RESULTS

The students who submitted journals remained positive and enthusiastic about iPad use in the field, despite some of the initial challenges.

The students who used the LifeTimesTALK app successfully used it for both one-on-one and group facilitation. The app provided relevant topics, photographs and questions that encouraged meaningful discussion between the student and client.

#### Common themes reported

- Stimulating and engaging tool for clients
- Portability of iPad an asset in the field
- Power of personalized music to engage older adults on an emotional level
- Able to introduce life-long learning opportunities
- Clients who were isolated became more social
- Helpful tool for managing challenging behaviours
- Facilitated unique experiences for bonding with clients
- Improved client/student relationships by learning more about clients
- Able to introduce a new technology in a non-intimidating way
- Positive response from majority of coworkers and management

#### Uses other than client engagement

- Video taping practicum special events
- Note taking

#### Challenges

- Wi-fi availability at practicum
- Clients initially hesitant and uncomfortable using an iPad
- Dexterity challenges using the touch screen technology

### Facilitated iPad Use - Specific Strategies

#### One-on-one

- Listening to music
- Watching sports
- Listening to the radio
- Reminiscence
- Playing games
- Listening to audio books
- Searching for words and finding the meaning
- Google search
- Watching movies
- Accessing Google Earth
- Learning languages
- Creating artwork
- Using a translator app to communicate with non-English speaking clients

#### Group

- Special occasions
- Current news discussion
- Reminiscence
- Theme activities
- Famous personalities

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The students were able to use the iPad as an effective tool to engage clients in the field and to support their learning outcomes.
2. Using the iPad increased the effectiveness of student/client engagement whether students were working with clients one-on-one or facilitating large groups.
3. This study supports the use of iPads in the field as a meaningful, permanent fixture of the SSW-G program. The Centre will continue to work with the program coordinator to develop processes in order to ensure that all students are able to use iPads in the field successfully.
4. The LifeTimesTALK app is clearly a valuable, engaging and useful tool and will likely find a place in the toolkits of program leaders.

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