RESEARCHING ENQUIRY-BASED BLENDED LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY BY PUBLISHED WORK

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April 2014
ABSTRACT

Enquiry-based blended learning (EBBL) research in social work education forms the basis of this submission. The core EBBL theme is defined, developed and analysed through four avenues of research, namely, scenario-planning, teaching and learning using EBBL, researching students’ experiences of EBBL and embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education. One software publication is submitted illustrating how the author’s ability to work at the intersection of social work practice experience, learning design innovation and digital technology development has enabled him to present a unique perspective in this area of research. Two written and two software publications set the context for the scenario-planning themes that have influenced the EBBL research. Four themed written publications explore the development of teaching and learning approaches using EBBL, and lessons from students’ experiences of engaging with these EBBL designs. Two written publications explore the barriers and enablers to embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education. Using enquiry, a mixture of face-to-face and online teaching methods, life-like learning scenarios and opportunities to engage in independent and group-based learning, the research illustrates that EBBL approaches can help educators to enable learners to meet and, where possible, exceed the requirements of pre-qualifying social work education.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wonderful family who continue to provide the love, guidance, support and happiness that has enabled me to live a life that is full. They provide me with the values, strength and companionship that have permitted me to steer a happy and fulfilling journey that has been my life so far. Thank you for sharing your lives with me, you will always have my deepest love and gratitude.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Ann Davis for her sage advice, support, friendship and gentle encouragement over the years. Professor Sue White for her guidance and support whilst putting this submission together. Professor David Stephenson for encouraging my curiosity and experimentation. There are many other individuals over the years who given their time, provided encouragement and helped me realise what may have seemed like impossible dreams, you know who you are, thank you all.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE: KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINING ENQUIRY-BASED BLENDED LEARNING</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory Building as research</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario planning</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLICATIONS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario planning</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning using EBBL</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researching students’ experiences of EBBL</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF SUBMITTED WRITTEN PUBLICATIONS</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY OF SUBMITTED SOFTWARE PUBLICATIONS</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOINT AUTHORED STATEMENTS</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Within the first few weeks of my appointment at Birmingham University (June, 2001) I was asked by the Head of Department to redesign a ‘Diverse Communities: Implications for Practice’ module for first year MA social work students. Previous module evaluations revealed a level of student discontent based on a number of factors, including limited opportunities to apply theory to practice, restricted time for critical reflection and analysis, and inconsistent teaching methods (Cooner, 2005). This was my first opportunity in Higher Education to draw on my unique combination of knowledge and skills in technology, creative learning design, and social work practice experience to create an enquiry-based blended learning (EBBL) design. This design aimed to allow students to gain knowledge about diverse communities and create spaces in which they could experience, develop and consider “awareness of own values, prejudices, ethical dilemmas, conflicts of interests and implications for practice” (TOPSS, 2002, p. 63). This move away from a primarily didactic approach to teaching, to one that included student enquiry and a mixture of face-to-face and online techniques resulted in positive student evaluations. This feedback acted as an incentive to further explore how EBBL designs could be developed to prepare students with the knowledge, skills and values they would require for their future social work practice. The learning gained from the redesign of this module is one part of a journey that has resulted in a substantial and original contribution to professional training, practice, knowledge, research and published work in EBBL in social work in two Research Assessment Exercises.

1 References underlined are included in this submission.
This journey into the primary theme of EBBL in social work education has incorporated four avenues of exploration that form the core of this submission, namely:

- **Scenario planning** – theory building scholarship which has created and developed a framework to enable strategic thinking about how the properties of information and communication technologies (ICTs) may impact on social work education and practice;

- **Teaching and learning using EBBL** – applying the scenario planning messages, developing research and a critical analysis of the relationship between blending ICTs and enquiry-based learning to create new spaces for students to engage with social work knowledge, skills and values;

- **Researching students’ experiences of EBBL** – empirical studies to evaluate the impact on learners in preparing for social work practice using EBBL methods.

- **Embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education** – critical investigations into the barriers and enablers for embedding EBBL designs into interdisciplinary higher education teaching.

One software publication is submitted demonstrating how my knowledge, skills and experiences allow me to offer a unique perspective in this area of research. Two written and two software-based publications will demonstrate my contribution to scenario planning. Four themed and related written
publications explore the development of teaching and learning using EBBL and researching students’ experiences of EBBL. Two written publications explore the barriers and enablers to embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education. The submissions illustrate a coherent line of research with identifiable links that run throughout the works presented. The four avenues of exploration have emerged from the aim of defining, developing and analysing the relationship between EBBL approaches in preparing educators to help learners meet and where possible exceed the requirements of pre-qualifying social work education.

The commentary will begin by briefly contextualising the knowledge, skills and experiences that have enabled me to bring a unique perspective to this field of research, it will then define EBBL and the context for the research before situating the submitted publications within research questions derived from the four avenues of exploration outlined above. The commentary will discuss the written publications’ contribution to answering the research questions set and will illustrate my understanding of EBBL and how it has evolved through this process. To take this work forward, it will conclude by identifying a future research agenda.
A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE: KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES

In reviewing my research for this submission I recognise I have taken two quite clear philosophical positions in my approaches to EBBL in social work education. These can to a degree be articulated by two quotes from the educational philosopher John Dewey. In the first he states that “if we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow” (Dewey, 1944, p. 167). I feel that for social work education to be relevant in our continually changing society (Giddens, 1999), the methods we use to prepare the practitioners of tomorrow have to be creative, fluid and reflect the world in which our students will live and practice. The second quote is the belief that:

“Were all instructors to realise that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked.” John Dewey (1944, p. 146)

I feel these philosophical foundations and my distinct combination of knowledge, skills and experiences have allowed me to develop a truly distinctive perspective to exercise independent critical judgement and make a substantial original contribution to EBBL in social work education. To contextualise this contribution it is important to briefly outline the journey that has enabled me to work at the intersection of practice experience, subject knowledge, learning design creativity and technology.
Before joining the university I worked as a senior social worker and accredited practice teacher with experience of several different frontline settings. Here I experienced the joys and challenges of teaching students on placement. One common frustration during this period was the situation in which the perfect learning opportunity would arise two-weeks after a student had left placement. It was my search to find ways of enabling students to engage with these opportunities at a time most opportune for their learning that first led me to explore how computers could be used in teaching. In the 1990s I started to learn how to create interactive multimedia computer programmes. Having developed skills in software programming, video-capture and graphical user interface design I worked with my social work team to write case studies based on our collective practice experiences. This collaboration resulted in the publication of two CD-ROM computer programmes (Cooner, 1999, 2001), with the second being part funded by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

These CDs were generally well received by the social work community (see for example reviews in Appendix 1). Observing how students and educators used the CDs had a profound impact on how I would use technology in my future EBBL designs. These experiences taught me my teaching could be ‘augmented’ in four quite meaningful ways. First, I could ‘capture’ my own and colleagues’ practice experiences in multimedia formats to create problem-based case studies. Second, I could programme the case studies to respond to student input allowing them to analyse the outcomes of their actions in the form of feedback grounded in the team’s ‘practice wisdom’. This allowed them
to try different decision-making approaches without putting themselves or services users at risk of harm. Third, tutors could ask students to engage with the learning at a time and place of their choosing. Fourth I could create virtual spaces for students to make links between theory, policy and practice. I found students on placement often had difficulty grasping the complex interplay between national and local policy and the impact this could have on service delivery. So, in creating the Tackling Institutional Racism CD (Cooner, 2001) I used a games-based approach incorporating a virtual town (see submission) for students to enter and then engage in ten case studies where their decision-making would have an impact on whether the Black residents experienced equality of access to social care services. This approach encouraged students to grasp how policy could impact on their practice and through the processes of enquiry allowed them to surface and discuss some quite complex theoretical issues with peers and educators. The lessons from these experiences taught me that computer-based learning that triggered student curiosity (as opposed to simply delivering information) encouraged them to define key questions for exploration and research. Another critical lesson for my future EBBL work was the insight that when the CDs were combined with discussions with other learners/educators, this blend tended to result in more powerful learning experiences than if the students engaged with the software alone.

In developing these learning artefacts and processes I was not constrained by high production costs. This freedom of action and creativity meant I was uniquely positioned to innovate at the cutting edge of ICTs and social work
education. For example, shortly after joining the university I worked with Professor Mark Doel (Doel & Cooner, 2002b) to create a ‘Virtual Placement’ (VP) programme to help students prepare for ‘live’ practice placements (Doel & Cooner, 2002a). Changing from the CD-ROM to online delivery format allowed anyone with an Internet connection (globally) to download and use the VP. This was my first experience of engaging with learners in an EBBL design involving online discussion and debate. This experience (at a time when most Internet access was commonly via dial-up connection) provided two major insights. First, it demonstrated that anyone with an Internet connection could get free access to media-rich learning materials, second it provided cutting-edge insights into how asynchronous online discussion forums could be used to overcome issues of time and space in connecting global communities of learners.

As an illustration of my on-going commitment to engage learners in up-to-date learning environments and topics, I recently created a Social Work Social Media mobile phone/tablet app to help students and practitioners explore some of the ethical issues professionals face in using social media. This app has been downloaded internationally via the iTunes and GooglePlay Stores (Cooner, 2013b). I realise that being able to develop innovative resources like these has allowed me to theorise and produce learning artefacts and design processes that others may initially have difficulty visualising, or indeed not realise are needed until they are created. This ability to join the technical, educational and social work subject dots (see software submission for example, Cooner, 2013b) has enabled me to produce and share digital
artefacts and processes with colleagues to help them take their teaching beyond the confines of the traditional classroom.

The design, development and use of the submitted software publications embodies original research and scholarship in social work education and has helped to support the intellectual infrastructure by enabling educators and students to 'augment' their abilities to teach and learn in ways that have not been possible before. This development experience has been critical in influencing my EBBL approaches by helping me to develop learning designs and artefacts that promote “acts of cognition, not (simply) transferrals of information” (Freire, 2011, p. 10). Reflecting on the journey outlined in this submission, I believe the experiences of engaging in the processes of developing and refining not only the digital artefacts, but also the learning processes that support them, has placed me in a unique position to be able to provide an original contribution to the field of EBBL in social work education.
DEFINING ENQUIRY-BASED BLENDED LEARNING

In this commentary the term EBBL is used in a particular way (see Cooner, 2005; Cooner, 2010b). The designs presented are based on a constructivist theoretical paradigm that acknowledges students bring their own personal history, knowledge and experiences into a learning encounter. This contrasts with didactic approaches that primarily view knowledge as something that exists ‘out there’ external to the student and therefore can be ‘given’ through the processes of ‘transmission’ (Rand, Binswanger, & Peikoff, 1990). The designs explored here are created on the basis that learning arises from social practice and is ‘emergent’ rather than ‘given’ or ‘discoverable’ (Goodman, Lillis, Maybin, & Mercer, 2003; Scollon, 2001; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Therefore, the designs in the submitted papers focus on what ICTs can usefully enhance in the learning process, rather than purely seeking ways to replicate and replace ‘traditional didactic’ teaching approaches.

All the EBBL designs use triggering events based on scenarios and problems students may be encounter in social work settings. The aim of the triggers is to situate student learning in work related contexts (Burgess, 1992; Burgess & Taylor, 2005; Burgess & Young, 2005; Cree & Davidson, 2000; Laurillard, 2002). Students also work collaboratively in teams to research, review, agree and propose solutions to the problems posed. Students then present their work to peers and tutors at the end of a defined learning process where they will be expected to justify and defend their findings. The enquiry-based nature of the teaching approach means that a fundamental part of the learning emerges through a process of dialogue that takes place between students
and, students and tutors (Vygotsky, 1986). For deep and meaningful learning to take place, Garrison & Anderson (2003) argue that students should engage in communities of enquiry. To enable this, the EBBL designs seek to provide spaces for the following elements to co-exist:

- **Cognitive presence**—“an environment that enables learners to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of enquiry” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 11).

- **Social presence**—“the ability of participants in a community of enquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as “real” people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 94).

- **Teaching presence**—“the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 5).

The teaching approaches presented in this commentary demonstrate Garrison and Vaughan's (2008) following three key components for effective EBBL designs. The designs seek to:

- thoughtfully integrate face-to-face and online learning;
- fundamentally rethink the course design to optimise student engagement;
• restructure and replace traditional class contact hours. (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008)

Critics of approaches like EBBL argue that the term can often be “ill-defined and inconsistently used” (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 24). Therefore, EBBL within this commentary refers to an approach that utilises the strengths of blending ICTs and face-to-face teaching methods to stimulate meaningful student learning through the processes of individual and group-based enquiry.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Originally, the focus of research arose from seeking a solution to a teaching problem in practice (Cooner, 1999, 2001). This progressed into a curiosity about the potential ICTs had in augmenting social work educators’ abilities in higher education to create meaningful student-centred learning encounters (Doel & Cooner, 2002a). From this, a scenario-planning approach was developed (Gritton, 2000; Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003). This enabled a more critical scrutiny of the way ICTs could be employed in pre-qualifying social work education. This resulted in two articles (Cooner, 2004; Doel & Cooner, 2002b), both were highly influential in the development of my work. One provided a point of reflection at a given point in my career; the second guided my research and practice by allowing me to develop a vivid description of a plausible future. The questions explored in these papers laid the seeds of a teaching approach that sought to integrate ICTs within enquiry-based designs to create innovative opportunities for students to develop social work knowledge, skills and values.

The research questions that have driven this area of work have been:

- How might ICTs change the way social work educators and learners engage in and experience teaching and learning encounters?
- For educators, what are the technical and pedagogic challenges of creating a virtual learning environment for social work students?
- How should social work education situate itself to take advantage of the predicted changes in the field of ICTs?
• How should the principles and ethos of the profession guide the use of ICTs in social work education and practice?

This scenario-planning exercise enabled the generation of new knowledge through the development and incremental refinement of approaches to teaching and learning using EBBL. In the commentary, two articles outline the methods used to introduce concepts of diversity (Cooner, 2005, 2010a). This research focused on how EBBL designs could create spaces for students to use existing knowledge of diversity issues whilst concurrently developing the skills of reflection, communication and team working. In Cooner and Hickman (2008) an EBBL design explores how students engaged in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to develop learning not only in child protection law, but also accessed spaces to cultivate the skills and values required for competent, confident and reflective childcare professionals. Finally, Cooner (2014) explores how a Think Families and Whole Systems module was adapted using an EBBL design to provide opportunities (within a congested curriculum) for students to explore the ethical and boundary issues social workers need to be mindful of when working in a socially networked society.

The research questions that shaped this area of work included:

• To what degree does an EBBL approach ‘add value’ for social work students in creating spaces to not only gain subject knowledge, but also develop skills in reflection, communication, problem-solving, team-working?
• How can EBBL designs create spaces for students to reflect on how their existing knowledge, beliefs and feelings may impact on their practice?

• In large cohorts, are EBBL approaches that utilise video case studies able to provide students with safe and effective learning opportunities to reflect ‘in’ and ‘on’ action?

• Within a congested curriculum how can EBBL designs enable educators to introduce additional learning opportunities for students to gain skills and knowledge around the ethical uses of social media?

• What lessons can be learned from using Facebook as ‘site for learning’ in social work education?

• How might Facebook be used to prepare students to reflect on the ethical and boundary issues of using social networking sites in their future personal and professional lives?

Over the research period the questions provided data allowing me to interrogate the evolving impact of my EBBL designs on student learning. Through student feedback, I was able to reflect upon and share with the social work community how my students felt the learning designs were preparing them for their future practice in relation to the changing requirements and recommendations for the qualifying social work degree (GSCC, 2002; Munro, 2011; QAA, 2000; SWRB, 2010; SWTf, 2009; TOPSS, 2002).
The research questions that shaped this area of work include:

- In preparing for practice, what are the common strengths and weaknesses social work students identify in engaging with EBBL designs?
- What impact does discussion have on student learning when working in online communities?
- What has been the impact on the student learning experience of online contact with tutors during the EBBL process?
- How can a combination of face-to-face teaching, online lectures, quizzes and role-play impact on student’s abilities to apply knowledge and reflect on learning?

This work was followed by Cooner (2010b) that explored the potential impact Web2.0 could have on social work education and practice. This work explored how the ease and ubiquity of “read/write” websites (Richardson, 2006) could be used to overcome traditional barriers to service user and carer engagement in social work education. Utilising my previous research experiences helped me to fashion an article (Cooner, 2011) that sought to take these lessons and make explicit the implicit knowledge required to create EBBL designs. This work resulted in the generation of a set of resources that aimed to assist fellow educators add EBBL designs to their toolkit of teaching approaches (Cooner, 2013a). The paper also critically captured and illustrated some of the personal and institutional enablers and barriers educators felt they faced in adopting EBBL designs within their teaching practices.
The research questions that shaped this area of work included:

- How can Web2.0 technologies help to overcome some of the traditional barriers to service user and carer involvement in social work education?
- How effective are EBBL design resources in helping educators to develop learning that has student enquiry, discussion and debate at their core?
- What impact does learning how to create EBBL designs have on educators’ abilities to construct opportunities for interdisciplinary learning in higher education?
- What are the potential barriers and enablers for academics in adopting EBBL designs in their teaching practices?

Most of the data in this submission has been obtained through qualitative methodologies using questionnaires and semi-structured focus group interviews occasionally combined with quantitative approaches using surveys. Theory building (Yelloly & Henkel, 1995) has also been utilised to explore the impact of EBBL approaches on the educators teaching and students learning experiences.

**Theory Building as research**

Theory building has proved a useful tool in developing this research. Yelloly & Henkel (1995) have identified two types of theory building, these are general propositions, and how they operate in individual cases. The general
propositions in this commentary are located within the scenario-planning approach. They act as learning and planning tools centred on vivid descriptions of plausible futures (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003) based around developments in ICTs and how they may conceivably influence social work education and practice. The individual cases are located within the educators’ and students’ experiences of engaging with the EBBL designs.

Theory building has been recognised as a distinct form of research. In its guidance for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF, 2011) the Higher Education Funding Council (England) defined research as comprising:

“… a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of… the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas… artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved… processes. It includes research that is published…” (p. 48)

The definition also includes the development of teaching materials that embody original research and defines scholarship as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines. In this submission, scenario planning falls within this definition of research and scholarship since it has been undertaken in order to generate
new ideas using existing knowledge to gain original insights and produce innovative processes in the development of EBBL designs in social work education.

**Scenario planning**

A scenario planning approach was used to investigate, identify and plan for how ICTs could impact on social work education and practice. Within this framework, using existing knowledge of approaches in social work education, scenario planning triggered the generation of new ideas leading to the development of experimental EBBL designs. Investigation of educators and learners experiences of these learning processes provided new insights that through an iterative process (described below) resulted in new and substantially improved EBBL designs.

Lindgren & Bandhold (2003) argue that a scenario is not a forecast (a description of an unsurprising projection of the future) nor a vision (of a desired future) but a vivid description of a plausible future (a well worked answer to the question: What would happen if...?). They describe how scenario writing can act as an effective planning and learning tool in an “endlessly changing world” (p.4). To engage in effective scenario planning they propose the ‘OODA Loop’ method. This cycle comprises of Observation (sensing environmental signals), Orientation (interpreting), Decision (selecting from a repertoire of responses) and Action (executing a response). The OODA Loop was employed in this research initially in a scenario planning paper (Cooner, 2004). This was based on my Observation that access to ICTs
in the personal and institutional domains was likely to increase. Due to my familiarity and experience in the fields of technology and social work education, the paper proposed an Interpretation of a plausible scenario utilising industry projections in ICT developments. This process led to a Decision to use this scenario to focus my research and teaching development around EBBL designs in social work education. I was able to Action this work because I could independently function at the intersection of social work education, learning design and ICT development. This freedom of action meant I did not have to explain my observations or orient others outside of the social work discipline into my interpretation (e.g. Learning Design or e-Learning Consultants). I had the subject knowledge, pedagogic and technical capabilities to action EBBL designs and independently take them through the Loop process thus allowing me to create new designs, gain new insights, improve and publish new knowledge, learning and approaches.
CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH

Social work education does not exist in a vacuum, changes in pre-qualifying requirements, the higher education funding environment, access to social media via mobile devices, the changing nature and expectations of learners are amongst some of the factors that have helped shape my work. This section provides a brief overview of some of these issues to help situate the research presented.

O'Connor, Cecil, & Boudioni (2009) argue that the main goal of social work education is to prepare students for the challenges of practice. Doel (2012) illustrates how agencies, managers and service users want qualified social workers who are good at their jobs. He goes on to explain how public inquiries into child deaths raised concerns about how well social work programmes were preparing students for their future roles. These concerns in part led to the development of the competence approach to training social workers. For the Social Work Diploma (CCETSW, 1989) and Degree routes (DoH, 2002; QAA, 2000; TOPSS, 2002), the competence approach was based on outcome statements that:

“… set out what a student social worker must know, understand and be able to do to be awarded a degree in social work. The National Occupational Standards for Social Work set out what employers require social workers to be able to do on entering employment.”

(DoH, 2002, p. 2)
At the beginning my career as a university lecturer I found there were some advantages to a competence-based approach. For example, a focus on outcomes provided social workers with opportunities to demonstrate appropriate use of skills and knowledge in context specific situations, such as illustrating how particular elements of law might relate to a given practice situation. However, as an educator with frontline experience, a critical appraisal of this approach led me to feel at times it was better designed at producing technicians than rounded professionals capable of dealing with the uncertainty of social work practice (Cooner, 2005). I felt the prevalence of a primarily didactic class-based teaching culture at university restricted opportunities for students to experience how to apply theory to practice, engage in team working, critical reflection, conflict resolution and other additional learning likely to be useful in their future social work roles. Like Lester (2014), I felt the focus on competence lacked an adequacy in preparing students to engage in social work type contexts that may present complex and evolving situations. For me, there was an emerging awareness that a potentially limitless list of competencies would be required to ensure social work students were appropriately prepared to deal with the whole individual within their social context, a view shared by Trevithick (2010) and Doel (2012) amongst others.

Reviews of pre-qualifying social work education also seemed to question the adequacy of a competence-based approach. Laming (2009) highlighted research that found nearly two thirds of newly qualified children and families social workers reported that their degree “equipped them just enough or not at
all for their current role” (p. 51). Munro (2011) also found that most newly qualified social workers felt that their degree did not provide them with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to undertake their roles.

In 2008 the Social Work Task Force (SWTF) was set up to review the social work profession and advise on reform. It published a report entitled, ‘Building a safe and confident future’ (2009) emphasising the need for qualifying programmes to help students develop social work skills, knowledge and values but also underscored that increased focus should be placed on enabling learners to make links between theory and practice. To implement the SWTF recommendations, in 2010 the Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) was created. In its report, ‘Building a safe and confident future: one year on’ (2010) it recommended a move away from the National Occupational Standards to a Professional Capabilities Framework. The SWRB adopted Price’s definition of a capability as meaning:

“... an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new and challenging circumstances” (Price, 2004, p. 227).

Long before the recommendations of the SWRB in 2010, I found my work into EBBL had started to explore learning designs aimed at meeting some of the above requirements, for example when working with issues of diversity, students had long complained that a ‘knowledge banking’ approach was
inadequate. Therefore, using EBBL designs students were given spaces to engage in critically reflective practices, allowing them to question existing knowledge, beliefs and feelings with the aim of equipping them with the problem-solving skills they would require to work in highly fluid situations in the future (Cooner, 2005). This type of EBBL design illustrated that educators could make social work learning more meaningful for students by exposing them to the type of emergent and evolving situations they were likely to face in practice. These learning experiences were made possible by imagining teaching that extended beyond the traditional confines of the lecture room.

Rafferty (1997) has illustrated that creative innovation in social work teaching and learning is not new. The seminal work of Burgess (1992) on implementing problem-led learning using an enquiry and action learning approach demonstrated that educators could create designs that moved beyond the classroom and placed the student at the centre of a complex work related learning process. However, there were a number of practical constraints that pioneers like Burgess faced in the 1990s that increasing access to ICTs started to overcome. For example, Burgess had to produce hardcopy resources for students to use, also facilitators and students had no option but to arrange times and rooms to engage in face-to-face study group meetings. Using ICTs, students can now access multiple electronic learning resources on or off campus. Also, ICTs mean tutors and students are not prevented by time or space constraints from communicating to develop learning. The opportunities offered by ICTs have changed the way educators can teach and students can experience learning. Using EBBL designs also means that
students can engage in meaningful ICT skills development at an equivalent level to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), a requirement introduced in 2002 for the social work degree. Although this requirement was removed in 2009 the GSCC at the time still required that social work students meet the Quality Assurance Agency benchmarking statement in respect of ICT (QAA, 2008). Rafferty and Waldman (2006) raised concerns about the way key social work documents set out the skills and knowledge students were to acquire in relation to accessing and using ICTs. They outlined the problem in the following way:

“The skills and knowledge align more to information development and retrieval, information sharing, monitoring, recording and accessing the information base than they do to using information and communication technology as a practice method for engaging directly with service users.” (p. 13)

Building equivalent ICT development into EBBL designs has meant students can gain basic literacy skills and at the same time experience and reflect upon the role the medium can have on their future practices. This is particularly important at a time when UK public services are being increasingly offered online and the government is committed to providing digital-by-default services (Watling & Rogers, 2012). Using EBBL approaches means that students are provided with spaces not only to develop the required ICT skills, but also opportunities to make links with broader issues such as the impact
digital exclusion can have on socially marginalised communities (Steyaert & Gould, 2009).

Access to ICTs has also changed the nature of the higher education learner. Plenderleith and Adamson (2009) illustrate that learner expectations at university are changing because students generally have easier access to, and familiarity with mobile devices and social networking. Students are increasingly expecting more flexible technology-based teaching methods. This is particularly amplified by the current economic climate in terms of higher education and social work practice. As HEI’s make cuts and freeze their teaching and research budgets and increase student fees, the Department of Health (DoH, 2013) has been consulting on the current bursary scheme provided to social work students. It is likely that the impact on students will be higher fees and the bursary may end or be restricted resulting in more students having to work whilst studying. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through its Strategy for E-learning (HEFCE, 2005) initially recognised the need to embed e-learning and then enhance teaching and learning through the use of technology (HEFCE, 2009) to meet some of the expectations and needs of the changing learner. What was not clearly spelt out was how these aims could be achieved. This submission illustrates how some of these aims can be realised by outlining a journey of creative experimentation, review and enhancement with the goal of building a coherent body of knowledge from which can be derived effective EBBL approaches for teaching and learning in social work education. It is within this
changing Higher Education and social context that this research has taken place.
Scenario planning

An overview of how ICTs could change the way social work educators and learners experienced engaging in a teaching and learning encounter was presented in Doel and Cooner (2002b). This paper sought to demystify the processes of creating a web-based educational multimedia programme. In preparing students for their first practice placements, it provided a rationale for creating the ‘Virtual Placement’ by illustrating some of the strengths and weaknesses of using software in social work education. Using an ICT-based approach demonstrated to educators that some of the pedagogic concerns at the time, such as the increasing dominance of the competency approach (Kelly & Horder, 2001) could be tackled by using the power of multimedia. The paper illustrated that in developing the metaphor for the VP, placing too much emphasis on competence could have denied learners opportunities to consider the holistic approaches required for ‘joined up’ practice. Unique for the time, we demonstrated how these concerns could potentially be addressed by creatively engineering a virtual world based on the metaphor of a wood (see software submission, Doel & Cooner, 2002a). The wood allowed students to navigate their way around seven trees each helping them to explore the issues of:

- self-knowledge
- knowing and learning
- becoming and being a professional
- communicating
• collaboration and conflict
• making decisions
• evaluating and reflecting

The wood had been carefully designed to re-create situations, dilemmas and responses that could occur in live placements. The aim was to help the students (as explorers) consider the holistic nature of good practice, rehearse it and see “the wood for the trees”.

The article and software illustrated to educators the degree to which ICTs combined with a blend of creative approaches could potentially be used to address barriers in providing effective learning opportunities for students. The paper also helped establish that the software and hardware at the time were not mature enough for ‘virtual’ placements to replace ‘live’ ones and raised broader questions about where ICTs should and should not be used in preparing students for their future practice. It illustrated the strengths ICTs could bring into the learning encounter; for example, it outlined how software could be used to place students in unusual or challenging situations. This facility provided them with opportunities to take risks in safe environments enabling them to learn from their decision-making processes. It also highlighted the potential of ICTs to allow students to work at their own pace in an environment responsive to their learning needs. Given the difficulty in finding good quality practice placements, the paper highlighted how using a virtual placement programme could also allow tutors to screen a student’s suitability to undertake a live placement. It also explored some of the technical
challenges of producing a virtual learning programme and demonstrated how the changing nature of Internet access moved us from a CD-ROM to web-based project. This illustrated the constantly evolving nature of the ICT environment and the need to adapt teaching practices to exploit its full potential. It was at this stage that I stopped to take stock of my approaches to teaching using ICTs.

Reflecting on the development process for the VP from a CD-ROM to a web-based programme made me realise that we were being led by the changes taking place in the ICT world. Rather than dancing to the changing tune of ICTs, I proposed in Cooner (2004) that we had to try and situate ourselves in a position where we could anticipate and positively influence the way ICTs could be incorporated into the teaching and learning process. To do this a scenario planning approach was used to create a vivid description (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003) of a possible “future” blended learning encounter. This description was made possible because it was based on my software development experiences, for example the scenario of Paul using virtual simulations drew on my experiences of creating and using video-based virtual case studies (see software submission, Cooner, 2001). The paper also drew on my interpretation of industry predictions for ICT developments. The vivid description of students having access to ubiquitous, affordable, Internet connected wireless mobile devices has been realised in the form of smart phones and iPad/Android tablets available today. More than the technology, it was the power these devices offered for instant global connections with communities of learners that the paper tried to draw discussion around. The
prospect of social work students, practitioners, educators and service users employing these devices to mediate communications raised and encouraged questions about whether social work educators were situating themselves appropriately to take advantage of the potential learning opportunities this inter-connectivity offered, and whether existing ethical guidelines were sufficient to cover the types of communication possibilities envisioned in the education and social work practice fields of the future.

This work generated new knowledge and learning at time when it was acknowledged that social work educators as a whole were not engaging with learning technologies (Rafferty & Waldman, 2003). It introduced new conceptual frames, tools and access to experiences with which to analyse the nature and scope of this evolving subject area. As the second, third and fourth routes of exploration in this submission illustrate, creating a vivid description of a plausible future using scenario planning also provided a foundation on which learning and teaching methodologies could be built and researched in relation to assessing their relevance and value in preparing social work students for practice.

**Teaching and learning using EBBL**

Waldman and Rafferty (2008) outlined how the DoH in 2002 recognised the potential e-learning offered for social work education. As part of the new social work degree development, the DoH established an E-learning Strategy Group. SWAP (the Higher Education Academy’s Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work) as part of this group’s work produced a report entitled
‘Building Capacity for the Social Work Degree – A Scoping Study’ (Rafferty & Waldman, 2003). This study helped to strategically position e-learning in the social work curriculum at the policy level in England and Wales. The report found that there was patchy historical development of e-learning in social work education and recommended that skills programmes be implemented to support educators in embedding e-learning into their teaching. The report suggested that the creative and skilled use of e-learning resources could move the model of social work education on from:

- Stage 1 - Replacement (Using online technology to do the same task as before); and
- Stage 2 - Enhancement (using online technology to enhance what you did before) to:
- Stage 3 - Transformation (using online technology to do what you couldn’t do before) (p. iii)

The work presented in this submission has moved beyond the constraints of a purely e-learning based model and has consistently operated at the Stage 3 level, providing opportunities to develop new insights around the development and application of EBBL designs. For example, the VP discussion board was open to anyone globally who had downloaded the programme and wanted to participate in a conversation about their learning. This transformative engagement with a global community of learners created one of the experiences that formed the basis for the scenario planning paper. This sought to extrapolate a number of important lessons gained from these early
online encounters. Amongst these was the need to carefully design blended teaching methods that enabled tutors to guide student learning, provide spaces for reflection, opportunities to apply learning, and engage in a community where the fluid exchange of ideas offered by face-to-face encounters was not lost. The scenario planning exercise provided a framework around which developmental work could focus on blending ICTs and enquiry-based learning to create new spaces for students to engage with social work knowledge, skills and values. The initial emphasis was on creating transformative EBBL designs that utilised university-based Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) (Cooner, 2005, 2010a; Cooner & Hickman, 2008) and then moved onto a platform that the majority of students already inhabited, the social media site Facebook (Cooner, 2014).

The development work for creating EBBL designs was based on the six research questions listed earlier. These questions were developed through on-going discussions with students and educators about the teaching methods used on social work programmes. These discussions along with personal research and experiences had helped to establish a number of learning design principles. The following five principles reflected an understanding of the potential transformative opportunities EBBL designs offered to educators in providing social work students with access to relevant learning within the changing social and higher education contexts. The five principles were that:
1. Compared to purely didactic approaches to teaching, EBBL designs within the same curriculum time constraints can allow educators to offer students working in communities of enquiry additional opportunities to develop relevant social work knowledge, skills and values.

2. Educators employing an EBBL design can create opportunities for social work students to not only to acquire knowledge, but also apply it in contexts mirroring real-world type situations.

3. With increasing numbers of students entering higher education, EBBL designs will offer social work educators additional methods of meeting some of the challenges of teaching larger numbers of students.

4. Increasing access to mobile and wireless devices connected to the Internet will create new areas for teaching around professional boundaries and ethics in social work.

5. Using EBBL designs, new virtual environments students already inhabit can be used to situate and make more meaningful their learning about online professional boundaries and ethics.

A number of reasons made it imperative that transformative methods of teaching and learning were pursued during the research period. Chief amongst them was the sustained increase in the number of students studying for the social work degree, for example, the Children’s Workforce Development Council showed that between 2009-10 and 2010-11 social work rose to the top ten subject choices for UCAS applications, resulting in an increase of 41.3% (CWDC, 2011). From 2001 onwards the University of
Birmingham saw a steady increase in the number of students studying for the undergraduate and postgraduate social work degrees (Cooner, 2010a). This period also saw an increase in access to the mobile Internet and changing patterns of how people used social media to mediate their relationships (ONS, 2013). These changes were having a profound effect on the number of students being taught and the role learners expected ICTs to play in their education (Ahmedani, Harold, Fitton, & Shifflet Gibson, 2011). The blurring of personal and professional boundaries as a result of social media also started to pose new challenges. Educators had to find meaningful ways of teaching students to ensure the ethical standards of the profession were maintained in their personal and professional uses of these new and changing digital environments (Cooner, 2014). These changes required transformative rather than replacement or enhancement approaches. To this end the work published in the scenario-planning stage provided a sound framework to guide the creation of transformative learning designs.

The research published in this part has been based on a process of critical enquiry and questioning that seeks to make accessible for educators the lessons learned about how best to blend ICTs and enquiry-based learning methods to do what they could not do before. It has created new knowledge and learning around using EBBL designs in teaching, learning and assessment in an environment where increasing student numbers and access to and use of ICTs are having a profound impact on higher education, social work practice and wider society. It provides educators with a theoretical underpinning based on a constructivist approach to learning, and new
teaching methods designed to ensure their students can have access to innovative learning designs that can help them enter the workforce with the knowledge, skills and values relevant for 21\textsuperscript{st} Century social workers.

\textit{Researching students' experiences of EBBL}

Using qualitative and quantitative methods students’ experiences of engaging with the EBBL designs were explored. Oliver, Harvey, Conole, and Jones (2006) argue that research of this nature can have two major benefits. First, it can provide new insights into whether the intended goals of the learning designs are achieved and second, an examination of the variables influencing the students’ learning processes can create new knowledge to help refine future teaching approaches.

The main addition to knowledge of the four articles submitted here came in the form of the words the learners used to describe and reflect upon how the individual components of the EBBL designs impacted on their overall learning experiences. To help them consider the \textit{individual} within their \textit{social context} the EBBL designs had two broad learning goals. The first was to provide students with:

\begin{quote}
“... culturally relevant, experiential and purposeful learning episodes, rather than the consumption of abstract knowledge in environments alien to that in which the knowledge was both created and will be applied in the future” (Rudd, Sutch, & Facer, 2006, p. 5)
\end{quote}
This EBBL goal was important because as Wenger (1998) illustrates, to prepare students to join a profession like social work they have to do far more than acquire knowledge, they also have to learn about being a practitioner by adopting the profession’s culture, ethics and values. This process often involves engaging in a community of learners to acquire and negotiate the broader and often quite different forms of knowledge to that required in non-professional educational settings. The second learning goal recognised and sought to integrate the lessons Cree and Davidson (2000) highlight. They illustrate how enquiry-based approaches can ensure students have access to opportunities to develop:

"conceptual knowledge (knowing that—facts, theories and propositions), procedural knowledge (knowing how—skills), strategic knowledge (knowing what to do when), personal knowledge (knowing about their own values and belief systems) and professional knowledge (knowing about social work's values and codes of practice)." (p. 92)

The research presented in this part of the submission outlines from the students’ perspective the degrees to which the EBBL designs were successful in achieving the above learning goals. By articulating the strengths and weaknesses, the learners’ perspectives helped to generate fresh insights that enabled the development of new ideas to produce innovative EBBL designs and processes using the OODA Loop method. The following summary of the
four articles in this part of the submission briefly illustrates the types of insights that arose.

In Cooner (2005) Moshman’s (1982) theory of dialectical constructivism and Vygotsky’s (1986) zone of proximal development were used to construct an EBBL design. The aim was to encourage students to engage in critically reflective practices to enable them to question their existing knowledge, beliefs and feelings about the many diverse communities that make up British society. Student feedback reported that the opportunity to engage in situational learning supported by the processes of web-mediated dialogue with peers and tutors provided them with opportunities to construct knowledge that could positively influence their ability and skills to promote social inclusion in situations of diversity. The research also highlighted from a student’s perspective important lessons for educators about the pros and cons of scaffolding online learning and how problems accessing the Internet can impact on the learner experience.

The lessons from the above research influenced the next EBBL design. In Cooner and Hickman (2008) the design had additional layers of complexity that consisted of face-to-face lectures, sequentially accessible online reading materials and quizzes, online discussion forums and a case conference role-play. These were introduced as part of a child protection teaching sequence. An analysis of the feedback found that learners appreciated the more student-centred, interactive and flexible approaches to learning the online resources offered. This research illustrated that enabling students to learn procedural
knowledge in a sequential manner online gave them an opportunity to learn at their own pace. The feedback also illustrated that learner confidence rose when students had an opportunity to apply their knowledge in the face-to-face case conference role-play. They reported that this helped them reflect on their knowledge and skills development because they were able to engage in a 'real world' type situation.

Student feedback in Cooner (2010a) illustrated how an EBBL design could provide students with a safe learning environment to encourage a high degree of introspection, discussion and confidence to develop appropriate professional reflective practices, even when they were part of a large cohort. Students described their experiences of engaging in a learning design that utilised face-to-face teaching, online video lectures, discussion forums, workbooks and video case studies. Students indicated that although some problems did arise when working in groups, on the whole the learning design provided them with spaces to explore the complex relationship between knowledge, learning, thinking, reflection and action required in professional education. This research illustrated to educators, through student feedback, that some of the obstacles to effective learning in large cohorts could be addressed by creatively employing EBBL approaches.

With students and social workers increasingly using social media sites, Cooner (2014) sought to discover whether Facebook could be used as a site for learning. An analysis of literature related to the ethical uses of social media sites is reported providing a rationale for using and engaging with this
platform. The paper also outlines how using an EBBL approach enabled the inclusion of this additional area of learning within a congested curriculum. Student feedback highlighted that in using Facebook, their confidence in being able to outline the ethical issues, personal privacy concerns for professionals and service users, and the potential positive and negative aspects of using social networking sites for future professional development increased as a result of engaging with this learning design. The research also illustrated some of pressures a lone tutor could face when using a mobile device to guide student learning.

These contributions have aimed to encourage debate about the relationship between active student learning, social learning, authentic learning and the legitimate use of technology in social work education. The research also provides new insights into some of the challenges for students and educators in constructing and engaging in complex multi-layered EBBL designs. This work has aimed to cultivate innovative and research informed developments of learning approaches in preparing social work students for professional practice.

**Embedding EBBL practices in interdisciplinary higher education**

Barr and Ross (2006) and Dunworth (2007) illustrate that opportunities for interdisciplinary teaching and learning in social work education can have the potential to improve service user outcomes by promoting collaborative working between health and social care professionals. Tew, Holley, and Caplen (2012) report that when service users and carers are part of this
teaching and learning process, their input can have a profound impact on how students perceive and feel they will undertake their future interdisciplinary practice.

From 2005 to 2010 I was seconded part-time to the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health (CEIMH). Here I used EBBL approaches to promote interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning across several different disciplines within the university. CEIMH used the term interdisciplinary to formally acknowledge that in all our work the contributions of service users and their carers (SU/Cs) would be respected and valued (on an equal basis) to all other disciplines involved in the training of mental health professionals. Our approach therefore meant that SU/Cs were actively involved in teaching, learning design development, assessment and evaluation processes. In (Cooner, 2010b) I outlined a number of barriers SU/Cs and educators have traditionally faced in working collaboratively to undertake these activities. Drawing on the experiences of over seventy-funded CEIMH projects the publication outlined how we had used Web2.0 technologies to overcome some of these barriers to ensure SU/C involvement was seamlessly embedded into the student learning experience.

Using the OODA Loop method, for some time I had been Observing the impact Web2.0 technologies had on users abilities to easily read and write to web pages. I was able to interpret that this was a useful function for educators looking to develop interdisciplinary EBBL curricula. For example, a simple re-Orientation from VLEs to Web2.0 tools provided the potential to enable a wide
range of people (not hampered by VLE registration procedures) to engage in
enquiry by freely accessing and sharing collaborative processes with others to
consume, remix, repurpose and collectively generate new knowledge and
ideas. This analysis made me Decide to incorporate and assess the impact of
using (Action) a range of Web2.0 tools in interdisciplinary EBBL designs.
Cooner (2010b) illustrated, explored and shared with educators the underlying
principles of Web2.0 tools and how they could be used as part of EBBL
designs in interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

However, my work at CEIMH also revealed that we had to do more than
illustrate how fellow educators could undertake EBBL design development.
Work with CEIMH project partners revealed that when we worked on a one-to-
one basis, colleagues were able to engage in the development and delivery of
EBBL designs. However, once they returned to their departments they found it
difficult to sustain changes in EBBL practices without coming back for further
support. Because our funding ended in 2010 we had to find ways to
successfully embed sustainable EBBL change. Cooner (2011) outlines how
we set about meeting this challenge by creating sets of freely available EBBL
design resources (see Appendix 2). Cooner (2011) provides an analysis of
how teams of educators engaged with the resources during a two-day DiBL
(Designing for Enquiry-based Blended Learning) event. The evaluation
highlighted a number of learning points about how participants felt the
experiences and resources could impact on their abilities to develop
interdisciplinary EBBL designs. A number of institutional barriers and enablers
were surfaced, for example, it was felt that the time required to create EBBL
designs within a research intensive university could act as a barrier, whilst access to the DiBL resources and experiences of engaging with the two-day event seemed to promote educator confidence in developing EBBL designs.

The work in this part of the submission provided new insights into how the changes taking place in the wider online environment could help tackle some of the traditional barriers that have excluded important partners from helping students to prepare for interdisciplinary practice. In acknowledging that educators also need help and guidance to exploit these opportunities, the lessons gained from EBBL development with partners at CEIMH were used to invent new artefacts in the form of the DiBL resources. These freely available resources provided educators with new artefacts and frameworks with which to create and continue to develop their own EBBL designs and processes.
CONCLUSION AND AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In creating and researching EBBL designs my aim has been to improve the processes that can help students on their journey to becoming great social workers. I have learned over this time that to equip students with the knowledge, skills and values they will require for their future practice, educators must look at the processes of learning as more than the “transmission of knowledge”. By doing this they can create spaces for their students to engage in “change through experience”. Whilst the principles upon which the EBBL research presented here are not new, what is new is the means by which social work educators can engage with their students. Unlike at any time in human history, ICTs are allowing learners unprecedented access to opportunities to globally connect, access unlimited information and share and contribute to the learning of others in ways not possible before. The ease and access to relatively cheap Internet connected mobile devices has created a fertile environment in which EBBL can flourish. These changes have also created new “spaces” in which social work education must prepare their students to undertake their practice. For example, with the increasing use of social media, EBBL designs can prepare students to explore the ethics and values of engaging with social media as professionals, protect vulnerable online users and investigate the impact of digital exclusion on socially marginalised communities. The research presented has provided new insights and created new knowledge and learning to encourage peers to build upon this work.
Set against this backdrop there are two areas of research I aim to explore in the immediate future. The first seeks to investigate the pros and cons of collaborative learning between groups of international social work students. I am currently working with colleagues in Canada and Australia using Facebook. The aim is to find out how students perceive, share and discuss the ethical use of social media from different international perspectives. The technical, pedagogic and practical methods for undertaking this EBBL activity will be published along with the learner’s perspectives of their experiences of engaging with the EBBL design. A major long-term research goal is to see if this global community of learners persists once the formal teaching sequence is concluded and what impact this connectivity may have on their future social work practices.

The second area of research involves mobile app development. When I first started creating software the only way to access learning materials was by using desktop computers tied to fixed locations. Smart phones are now many times more powerful and allow the learner to carry around every book, article and PowerPoint they have ever used in their learning. Access to this information combined with the power to connect at anytime and place with others using apps like Twitter and Facebook enable these mobile devices to provide an unprecedentedly flexible window through which pre and post-qualified learning and teaching can continue to take place. My research aim is to create more apps to investigate the design attributes that can support EBBL approaches. Using the OODA Loop method I believe that the processes for creating mobile apps will become much easier in the future, but
to ensure the designs do more than deliver content will require on-going research and development. To begin this process, my aim is to publish the steps I undertook to create the Social Work Social Media app. The app (Cooner, 2013b) itself has embodied original research in the technical, learning design and social work domains. Its existence and on-going discussion about its use has generated important new insights for social work education.

Whilst the above provide two immediate directions for future research, I aim to continue to observe, orient and make decisions that enable me to undertake actions to blend, research and share learning and teaching approaches to help future students become great 21st century social workers.

**Word count:** 9,867
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Reviews base on race and racism, which the user can then test out in three 'interactive virtual' case studies. Singh Cooner sees the latter as the unique feature of this particular piece of work, providing a safe learning environment, where no 'real' black people will be affected by racist practice. His hope is that 'the experiences you gain from using this programme will enable you to identify and prevent racist social work practice from taking place in the real world with real people'.

The programme is divided into four major sections—Introduction; Racism; Issues of Racism and Social Work, and Case Studies. Each section has an introduction which comes in the form of questions which the user can explore by using the mouse. At several points in the CD key words are flashed up on the screen when the digital video facility is used, enabling the user to follow more clearly and remember the content of the sections. The design of the package allows for ease in Quitting or accessing any part of the programme by clicking on the required aspect on the top of the screen. It also provides for an on-screen list of Topics covered by the package, which the user can go to at any time during the use of the package by clicking on that title. In this way the user can be selective in the use of the content of the CD.

The programme also gives the user the facility of 'drop down boxes' containing details of the references used in the text.

Virtual social work training opens traditionally, with a knock on a door and a female voice guiding you to the start of the programme! There is a Guide and an Intro Virtual Social Work Training—Volume 1: Race & Social Work

Tarsem Singh Cooner, as a 'virtually' one person show, has managed to put together a complex, yet user friendly, interactive, multimedia, social work training package. One key feature of this work is that it is 'a programme developed by a social worker, for social workers'.

Tarsem Singh Cooner, is a qualified social worker, with a diverse and wide-ranging experience in the social care field over the past 10 years. He also has specific knowledge and experience in social work which includes direct work with children and families and people with drug and alcohol related difficulties. His therapeutic work includes trans-cultural counselling and racial identity work. These biographical details appear in the 'credits' section at the introductory level of the CD. The information about his academic and practice experience is helpful in locating and making sense of the creator's interpretations of concepts and practice issues. In the area of computing and IT he is self-taught and has produced other CDs. He has created a CD using modern technology, which allows the user to explore and assess their knowledge and skills in anti-racist social work practice. This is done initially by presenting a knowledge...
REVIEWS

Introduction to the program. These sections give information about how the program is organised and shows the user how to navigate their way around the package. In an introduction to the program, using digital video, Tarsem explains the package, and his intentions in its creation. The use of the interactive digital video comes into its own in the case studies. All the video interactive sessions can be stopped, fast-forwarded or rewound. These sections are clear and accessible even to the novice computer user, for whom repetition of instructions is readily available.

As part of the introduction there is a section on terminology used throughout the work. The terms include: anti-racist social work; black; black perspectives; ethnicity; race; racism; and racist practice. With regard to the term 'black', whilst attempting to be inclusive, his use of the Dominelli quote, the groups being subjected to the most vicious and intractable forms of racism in Britain are black people, i.e. those of Asian, African, and Caribbean descent limits his intentions and is contradictory, failing to address the growing cultural, racial and ethnic diversity of this society, which should go beyond skin colour. For example, the complexities of addressing the needs of people of mixed heritage, the Irish and the latest members from specific European communities now resident here. Overall, the definition requires development to include the historical, sociological and political dimensions, which reflect the contested nature of the term. Clear definitions of contested terminology are crucial, particularly, as we have found in our experience in training on anti-oppressive/anti-racist issues, groups have struggled with terms such as 'black'. However, despite this criticism, the terminology section does provide a basic start to understanding some complex concepts.

Broadly, the knowledge base was well researched and informative, providing a sound theoretical base for the user. A major strength of the whole initiative is the way in which the design is interactive, in that the user has direct and immediate access to making the links between theory and practice. References were fairly up to date, but would need regularly updating. Directing the student/user to other relevant texts would enhance their knowledge and critical analysis.

Making use of digital video for the case studies is a creative and interesting idea. This builds on a long tradition of the use of case scenarios in social work training. It gives the student the opportunity to test out their knowledge and practice in two ways. Firstly, by listening and interpreting live situations, and secondly, by testing understanding of the issues through the choice of 'correct' options which relate to action needed to be taken to avoid racist practice. However, the case studies, in their current form, can be both limiting and at times frustrating. The user could be in a situation where they get no feedback until all the tasks were correctly completed. This could lead to 'game playing' as the user attempts to anticipate the correct answers. Whilst using the case studies it was often difficult to remember the focus of the task. On screen prompts here would be helpful. As users who are very familiar with the issues our observations were often signalled as invalid because we 'clicked too soon', having anticipated the racist practice in the scenario. This then meant that we did not receive any feedback and had to go through the case study again. The learner can then get into guessing, without gaining feedback about poor practice. The question then arises as to how far the system can successfully test the user's knowledge base and practice.

The use of Information Technology offers new and creative opportunities for learning. Despite Singh Cooner's innovative attempt we are not convinced that it is possible to learn and access values
and attitudes solely through interaction with a screen. It does, however, have value as one of many learning tools. In our view the case studies in their present form fail to deal with the complexities of live practice situations. Further, it is unclear at which group of workers the CD package is aimed. It appears to be directed mainly at white workers. The development of new case studies should be constructed in such a way as to enable all workers to critically analyse and challenge oppressive practices. Here lies the opportunity to develop material to address other social divisions.

In general we found the package to be a helpful and innovative teaching aid, which could be enhanced with a supporting workbook. This would help users to document and evaluate their learning. Tarsem Singh Cooner has capitalised on the growing use of technology in the teaching and learning environment and has successfully delivered, in an interesting and accessible way, on a difficult topic area. Trainers, practice teachers, students and practitioners in the fields of health and social care will find this a useful resource.

The programme can run on Windows 95/98/NT or higher, and Macintosh/Power PC. On the leaflet with the CD ROM it notes that in relation to Windows 95/98 `the recommended configuration is a multimedia PC with Pentium 120Mhz 16 meg Ram MPC compatible 4 speed CD ROM drive and 16 bit soundblaster compatible sound card and speakers, mouse, SVGA colour display capable of 16 bit colour'. Technical support may be obtained via the website address—www.virtualtraining.co.uk The package costs £15 for individuals and £50 for organisations, adding £2.50 for postage and packaging from: TSC Productions, P.O. Box 7959, Smethwick, West Midlands, B67 7RP.

We are grateful in writing this review for the helpful comments provided by our colleague Peter Sharkey, Principal Lecturer, who has specific responsibility for IT and social work teaching.

BEVERLEY BURKE & HILOMENA HARRISON
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Tavistock Clinic Foundation

For many readers, this special edition of Infant Observation will be a treasure chest of clear thinking, interesting insight and pragmatic suggestion. For others, however, it might well be a Pandora's box, containing, as it does, almost heretical mention of concepts such as `relationships', `emotion' and `psychoanalytic approaches'.

The title of the journal suggests a narrow focus on `watching babies' but this edition covers much broader vistas. The papers in the special edition encompass a range of topics including supervised contact, work with children with disabilities, and observation of organisations. There is likely to be something of interest to a wide range of social workers and other helping professionals.

The editorial is not one to be ignored. It will no doubt be controversial but is arguably a masterpiece. The two guest editors, Stephen Briggs and Hamish Canham, trace the tension between a view of social work as an activity dominated by the legal domain and managerialism— with subprofessional training based on outcome and competency— and the alternative view of a welfare-orientated profession in which relationships are central.

The first post-editorial paper is equally challenging, complex and inspirational. The author, Karen Tanner, describes a model of child observation adopted by the Goldsmith Diploma in Social Work. It proposes...
The Virtual Social Care Training CD-ROM Volume 2—Tackling Institutional Racism
Tarsem Singhooner TSC Productions, 2001, www.virtualtraining.co.uk

This CD-ROM provides a means of developing good practice in ten areas of institutional racism, through an interactive and user-friendly medium. It is likely to be particularly useful for social work and social care students and professionals who are interested in developing targeted responses to black communities in the UK. The content mainly focuses on service delivery and, although this is made clear within the introduction, the title could have suggested this.

The CD-ROM loads easily and there are step-by-step directions throughout. A good introductory section explains the methods of learning and provides definitions of key terminology, framing the content within social work discourse. This is followed by interactive case study material based on ten scenarios which allow examination of policy and practice in relation to consultation with black communities, planning and provision of services, ethnic record keeping and funding for the black voluntary sector. The interactive approach focuses on specific areas of service delivery and encourages identification of areas of good practice whilst acknowledging weaknesses in institutional structures and systems.

The overall quality and standard of the text is sound and likely to make a distinct impression when used within training. Other educational materials might provide more research detail and theoretical concepts produced in journal articles (Mama, 2001; Razack, 2001) and books (Ahmad & Atkin, 1996; Dominelli, 1988; Ahmad, 1990) but the unique approach used within the CD-ROM is likely to lead to the assimilation of ideas in an interactive and engaging way. The presentation is also interesting because materials available to teachers and trainers beyond the written word are still relatively rare.

The training method ensures that there is active engagement of the CD-ROM user with the case studies, which are each presented in three sections. The first (written) provides extremely good guidance on the areas under scrutiny; the second begins with an invitation to enter the virtual community (with Tarsem acting as a walking, talking trigger); and finally a concluding section provides feedback on the issues raised. Each case study presents a set of issues that need to be identified and the user can only progress when this has been completed successfully.

The material covered is extremely focused, clear and well presented both in verbal and written form. The user is primarily encouraged to locate areas of good practice and so is provided with an opportunity to consider development of services rather than problems that need addressing. Whilst the introduction addresses key questions the CD-ROM user may have, those less experienced with computer-based interactive approaches may find some aspects more difficult to manage.
REVIEWS

guidance at the beginning is very detailed but requires a level of recall that may result in a certain amount of repetition and replay. It is not possible to fast track the simulation element of the case study and if a point is missed it needs to be repeated in full. Those who wish to progress quickly may become frustrated when six out of seven issues have been identified but there is no means of progressing without repeating the whole section. There is no facility for fast tracking this and although it is easier when repeated, some users may find this tedious.

In order to deal with the problem of repetition it is useful to allocate more time than an average teaching session would allow, if the CD is to be used in a classroom. It can usefully be used over two or three sessions linked to discussion and debate on the areas covered. Trainers may need to allocate approximately three hours to allow time for exploration and subsequent discussion of the issues raised.

The CD depicts people of different ages, colour and gender. The issue of diversity within black communities is addressed within the anti-racist practice framework but wider anti-oppressive perspectives are not covered. Although the focus on institutional racism is the strength of this CD-ROM, it also raises broader questions about the impact of organisational history and culture on services. The content and delivery of the CD provides an exceptional example of material conceived and provided by black workers and is inclusive and sensitive to those who use it.

An issue the author may consider addressing in future work is how notions on which the 1976 Race Relations Act was based can be developed to meet the needs of the twenty-first century, which is struggling with larger issues such as reactive social policy addressing globalisation, national identity and providing services for black people seeking refuge and asylum in the UK. Although the CD-ROM is a good introduction to local service delivery, social workers and social care staff in all sectors are responding to social exclusion based on poverty, housing and income, whilst meeting the needs of particular groups. Clearly black people are disproportionately affected by oppressive institutional factors in society (McPherson, 1999) but the issue of poverty, income and class remains unaddressed within the discourse on anti-racist practice. A secondary factor, rarely articulated, is the role black individuals play in maintaining discriminatory structures and systems. It is true that black people living in the UK are different in culture, ethnicity and heritage but many are also increasingly contributing to and benefiting from global economic factors which impact on the most needy in society.

Broader issues such as declining social and public expenditure (Mishra, 1999) in the UK and the increase in the mixed economy of care (Ahmad & Atkin, 1996) are resulting in a more clearly definable hierarchy of oppression for black groups based on economic, educational and professional status within society. Although implementation strategies for local policy (Thompson, 2000) remain critical, teaching and learning needs to be increasingly framed within wider concerns based on rights and needs, for example, the 1998 Human Rights Act.

In conclusion, the CD will provide an excellent alternative way (from books and journals) of introducing students and professionals to racial exclusion issues. It can be used as an additional resource for those providing qualifying and in-service training. It is also a good refresher for those on post-qualification courses. It is well-produced and easy to use, and provides a useful introduction to anti-racist practice, a concept which is at once current (because of the imperative to maintain a focus on societal factors which oppress certain groups) and focussed (on local services). Globalisation is a significant current preoccupation within social work education. However, the phrase 'act local' remains an important message and clearly still applies for those...
concerned with change and development in service delivery.

References


The Handbook of Social Work Research Methods B. A. THYER (Ed.)

Most social workers base practice decisions on research from allied disciplines such as psychology, sociology, or social policy, that is conducted with methodologies that are not specifically adjusted to social work. The recent influx of social work research texts bears testimony to the fact that social work is becoming a research discipline in its own right. Many of these texts concentrate on particular methodologies (Kazi, 1998) or particular client groups (Iwaniec & Pinkerton, 1998). Thyer has now added a substantial handbook that covers the wide range of methods specifically applied to social work. In the introduction Thyer outlines basic, fundamental, and universally accepted principles of science, such as realism, determinism, positivism, rationalism, empiricism, objectionism, parsimony, and scientific scepticism. He asserts that other principles are universally rejected; these are metaphysics, nihilism, dualism, circular reasoning, and scientism. While I personally agree, I am only too keenly aware that some of this is wishful thinking. Social work research would progress a lot more efficiently if these principles were adopted. Sadly, dualism and circular reasoning, for example, are still rife in social work theory and not everybody accepts parsimony and empiricism as guiding principles. Some still argue that social works should focus mainly on dealing with key characteristics of post-modernity such as uncertainty, confusion, and doubt. Skepticism is fine. However, if not applied as scientific scepticism as advocated by Thyer it can actually undermine the doing of good science.

The book is presented in four parts. First, the reader is introduced to quantitative approaches and typical types of studies are outlined, for example descriptive studies, surveys, needs assessment, randomised controlled trials, programme evaluation, cost–procedure–process–outcome analysis, and single system methodology. Here most researchers are on familiar ground. The chapters are well written and illustrated. Second, qualitative approaches are addressed. The difference between qualitative and quantitative methods is presented in a very useful table format. The section on types of studies includes narrative case studies, in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, participant observation, and grounded theory. Each chapter is clear and readable, outlining strengths and limitations. These two first sections are well placed in this book but most of the material has been covered before, albeit not in as much detail and specific application to social work.

The third section on conceptual research includes theory development, historical research, literature reviews, and critical
THE DESIGNING FOR ENQUIRY-BASED BLENDED LEARNING (DIBL)

The DiBL resources can be accessed from the following website:

https://storify.com/Akali65/designing-for-enquiry-based-blended-learning-dibl

The website includes all the resources (below) including a video outlining the participants' views of their learning during the two-day event.

A handbook can be downloaded outlining how educators can use the same two-day DiBL training approach.
A blended learning design planner can enable educators to consider the areas that they need to address when creating an EBBL design.
A collection of design icons is included enabling educators to visually create EBBL designs.

Image of educators at the DiBL event using the design icons to develop an EBBL design.
A learning activity design glossary and resource pack can also be downloaded exploring the different concepts involved in creating an EBBL design. These are particularly useful for educators new to developing EBBL designs.
SUMMARY OF SUBMITTED WRITTEN PUBLICATIONS


SUMMARY OF SUBMITTED SOFTWARE PUBLICATIONS


This statement refers to the article:

In reference to point 5.2(iv) of the University of Birmingham Code of Practice on Assessment and Award of PhD by Published Work I can confirm that the above article was jointly co-authored. My contribution was 50% of the final published work.

Tarsem Singh Cooner
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I, Mark Doel (Emeritus Professor of Social Work, Sheffield Hallam University) confirm that Tarsem’s contribution to the above article was 50%.

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This statement refers to the software:


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This statement refers to the article:

In reference to point 5.2(iv) of the University of Birmingham Code of Practice on Assessment and Award of PHD by Published Work I can confirm that the above article was jointly co-authored. My contribution was 60% of the final published work.

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I, Gary Hickman (Director - Social Work Programmes, Birmingham University) confirm that Tarsem’s contribution to the above article was 60%.

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The creation of an interactive, web-based program to prepare students for 'live' placement

Mark Doell and Tarsem Singh Cooner

Summary: In this article, the authors tell the story of the creation of a web-based program of learning for students preparing for practice. The program is called 'A Virtual Placement' and aims to prepare students for an actual placement. The authors do not promote virtual placements as an alternative to live placements, nor as some kind of 'imitation', but as a complement to them, and possibly as a substitute for some of the functions which are currently expected of the live placement.

The progress from screenplay to electronic format is charted, with discussion of the dilemmas which arose from harnessing the new technology appropriately. The authors reflect on the way in which their ideas for a virtual placement developed and changed, and the significance of metaphor and play in shaping these ideas. The article should help put the program itself in context, and the authors hope that readers will feel encouraged to visit the website, which is freely available at www.hcc.uce.ac.uk/virtualplacement.

Key words: creativity; placement; virtual learning; web-based program

Accepted for Publication: June 2002

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What is a virtual placement?

In essence, a placement which is virtual is one which is not experienced in the physical space which we ordinarily associate with a placement (such as a social work agency or a hospital ward), nor in the timeframe we would also relate to a placement (such as 9:00 - 5:00). Dr Who might say that it is outside the usual space-time continuum!

Although we use the words 'virtual' and 'real' to describe these different kinds of experience, the virtual world is, nevertheless, one kind of reality. A virtual environment provides real experience which generates real learning for real students. Indeed, it is the actual environment which can sometimes seem surreal. Since we are not suggesting that virtual learning is unreal, we use the word 'live' rather than 'real' to differentiate these worlds.

Why a placement that is virtual?

Why might we wish to create a virtual placement? Certainly, we are aware of opposition to this kind of approach, based on apprehensiveness about the technology, or a misapprehension that the virtual opportunity is intended to replace the live. However, in identifying a number of reasons to develop a virtual environment for a student to learn about professional practice, we continue to hold the opinion that virtual environments cannot replace live ones.

Scarce resources

There has long been considerable difficulty finding placements for students, both in terms of quantity and quality. Placements are a relatively scarce resource and take much time to find, arrange and support. This process of placement finding is fraught and can evoke more anxiety than the placement itself. The impact on those students who are late in the queue for a placement is both considerable and unfair.
Since virtual placements can be created at will, they do not need finding and arranging in the same way as live ones. Whilst we are clear that live placements will always provide something which virtual ones cannot (Doel and Shardlow, 1996), virtual placements can, in turn, provide something which live ones cannot. If we can differentiate what this 'something' is, practice learning in the new social work degree could incorporate a period of virtual practice to take some of the strain off finding and supporting live ones. Like the driving test, not all students will be ready for placement or qualified practice at the same pace; in other words, some students will need rather more preparation for placement than others, and some students rather more time in live practice before they are licensed to practise. More preparation should enable us to use live placements more responsibly.

Screening

A resource as valuable as a placement is not to be squandered. For this reason it is important that it is safeguarded for those who are ready to use it. This is not to deny that a placement has a valuable function in arriving at a decision about a student's suitability; however, there would be a great advantage in discovering this more often at a stage before an actual placement has been secured. All those involved - i.e. the unsuitable student, the practice teacher, the agency offering the placement and, most of all, the service users - would benefit from any tool that enabled us to make reliable judgements about suitability to enter live practice.

Taking risks; Making mistakes

A virtual environment is one with virtual consequences. In other words, it is possible for students to take greater risks than would be appropriate with live people in live environments. It is reasonable to suppose that students' learning is freed if they feel they can make mistakes without the anxiety of the penalties that arise in live situations. Making mistakes is, of course, an important part of learning, but a difficult one for students who must, from
the very first day of a live placement, consider their own assessment as competent practitioners and the very real consequences for them and for others of any mistakes they make. A creative curriculum should include practice in making mistakes and recovery strategies. In some circumstances, Virtual mistakes have advantages over live ones, and might encourage students to experiment once in live placements, given appropriate support in the transition from virtual to live setting. Of course, real consequences are also of great value in the student's learning.

Creating unusual or challenging situations

An experience does not automatically result in learning and, indeed, can result in learning poor practices. The right kind of situation to enhance a student's learning might not 'happen' at the right time, and waiting for things to happen so that students can learn from them is a wasteful and often counterproductive strategy. Live placements are time-limited and it is difficult to ensure that the student is exposed to the degree of challenge which will promote best learning.

A virtual environment can be manipulated, in the best sense of the word. Learning opportunities can be sequenced in ways which experience and research begin to tell us is the most beneficial to novices; paradoxically, events can even be made to occur randomly if at any particular stage a student would benefit from a high level of uncertainty. We can envisage a time when the technology allows us to create as much or as little novelty and complexity into a situation as needed. Situations which would be highly unusual in the live world can be made to happen in the virtual one, rather as airline pilots learn to manage aircraft in a nose-spin; a highly unusual situation, but one worth rehearsing nevertheless.

Individual learning style and pace

There is something artificial about the notion that all students can cover a practice curriculum in precisely the same time, such as 50 days and 80 days in the outgoing Diploma in Social Work. We
know from less complex activities such as learning conversational Spanish or driving a car, that learners take widely differing times to achieve a common standard. A virtual placement allows individual students to learn at their own speed. Although the student must attain a level of competence to work in a live world in which such control is not possible, they are likely to be better prepared to accomplish this if they have had the opportunity to learn first principles in an environment which is responsive to their needs as individual learners.

Standardising practice learning experiences

Thus far we have been focusing on the needs of the individual learner and advocating the virtual placement as fulfilling some of these. However, placements are also instruments for assessing the competence of students and for making judgements about their ability to practise. One of the concerns about current placement provision is the comparability of one placement in respect of another. In other words, can we be confident that students in different placements are being tested to the same depth and rigour? Are students in different placements having comparable opportunities to demonstrate their abilities?

Virtual placements can standardise practice learning opportunities. This is not to lose diversity and variety, but to gain fairness and equity. This would help give the profession, and those outside the profession, the confidence that all students’ practice learning was tested to a sufficient degree, and that no individual student was advantaged or disadvantaged.

How ‘real’ should the virtual be?

Having felt that the case for some kind of virtual placement has been made, we needed to consider what this might look like. What follows is a reflection on the processes which led to the creation of the program itself. It is relatively unusual to read about these kinds of process (Ellis and Garland, 2000), and we
hope that this reflection will put the program in context and also encourage practice teachers and students to visit the site.

The few models we have for virtual environments are unhelpfully ambitious. There are the sci-fi cliches, such as 'Sleepers' (Woody Allen) and 'The Matrix' (Keanu Reeves), in which the protagonists don all-round headgear to be completely transported to another world in which their every sensation is felt as though it were live. Another model is the airline simulator; though not science fiction, this is nevertheless a highly sophisticated piece of equipment developed with the resources of wealthy airline manufacturers, and designed to develop technical skills rather than complex interpersonal ones.

The efforts of just two creators with, between us, a sabbatical and a modest grant were always going to be of a different scale. This imagined virtual world, in which students are transported to a placement in which they 'walk' around freely, experiencing it as live, was never a starter. How, then, to accommodate the virtual world we wished to create?

In fact, it is not necessary to wear sci-fi headgear to feel transported to another world, as we know from our experience of watching an absorbing film or listening to engrossing music. Indeed, human beings readily enter other worlds, for their own enjoyment and perhaps to gain a different understanding of the everyday world.

Moreover, attempting to recreate the regular world in a faithful manner has disadvantages. Realism ties us to the specific. Do we recreate the realistic world of the ward round, the children's home, the community care team, or the young offender's street corner .... ? Whichever reality is chosen excludes the others. Realistic settings must also be populated with realistic people with a gender, an age, an ethnicity, etc; people who are like us or not like us. This specificity is an essential aspect of learning in a live placement, but a potential drawback in a virtual one.

Responding to the medium

Every medium of communication has its own conventions. Authors writing for refereed journals are expected to use the
Harvard system of referencing and to adopt a certain language style. Conversations have their own rules, subtly changing from informal chat to formal interview (Lishman, 1994). Sometimes it is possible to defy these expectations and move the communication form into new territory, but the conventions are strong. As a young medium, the web does not yet have well-established conventions. In addition, it combines a number of possible communication forms: research and information-gathering, entertainment, anonymised written conversations in the form of chat-groups, and the like.

Learning and entertainment are a heady and risky combination. The learning dimension can make the entertainment rather 'worthy'; the entertainment aspect can make the learning seem gimmicky. Integrating the two is a challenge. So, too, is the contamination effect within similar media; the expectations we have of television (that it is passive, not in real time, entertaining, etc) are always a difficult subliminal presence when making training videos. Similarly, there are strong associations to be taken into account when developing programs for computer-assisted learning. One such is the videogame. In fact, with its format of pursuit and quest, challenge and reward, we decided to embrace it rather than combat it.

Ultimately, we wanted to create an element of 'familiar surprise'. Learning leads to changed patterns of thinking and doing, and it is often the element of surprise which breaks habitual thinking and doing. The unexpected can liberate us to develop lateral patterns of thinking and doing. The virtual world of soap opera springs outlandish surprises on a large following, perhaps as a safe way of rehearsing parallel, if less dramatic, situations in the live world.

With all these hypotheses in mind, and building on our combined experiences of developing simulations, videos, and interactive CD-roms (Cooner, 1999; Cooner, 2000; Doel and Shardlow 1998), we decided to place 'A Virtual Placement' in an unexpected setting.
The metaphor
To help create a sense of adventure and encourage a leap of faith out of the live world and into a virtual one, we called the student an Explorer, and the program a Quest. Casting the learning as a quest tapped into a motif familiar through the ages, with its latest on-screen manifestation in ‘The Lord of The Rings’ (2002). Hence the ‘familiar surprise’.

One of the current debates in practice learning is the potential tension between the increasing dominance of the competency approach and the need for ‘joined up’, holistic approaches to practice (Kelly and Harder, 2001). Focusing too forcefully on the former can lead to a failure to see the wood for the trees. Indeed, the notion of the wood and the trees is such a powerful metaphor that we decided it could support the whole program. The Quest motif and the Wood-and-trees idea sit comfortably together, and it is a metaphor which is capable of being extended imaginatively, with a number of other links, such as getting to the root of things and ideas bearing fruit. Other metaphors, such as making the necklace from the beads (Stirum and Fisher, 1998) are not so flexible.

If the person who explores the wood is to take some risks, a balance of challenge and reassurance is important. A wood has an established place in our collective unconscious. Mythology and fairy tale teach us that there is both foreboding and enlightenment in the wood. The wood is a near-universal cultural reference point, even if the idea of ‘wood’ does not necessarily have the same significance to each of us.

No doubt some people will enter easily into the spirit of the metaphor, whilst others will be puzzled and take time to settle in, and others will think it is just plain daft. It would be strange if it were not otherwise. We are all different kinds of learners and we all have different levels of creativity and, indeed, different ways of expressing it. We hope that some of the sceptics will be won over, but do not expect to escape reproach from those who like their learning straight down the line.
Creating a structure

Preparation

The purpose of the program is to help students to prepare for their live placement by introducing them to principles of good practice and giving them safe opportunities to develop skills for practice.

To make sense of this large canvass, we devised a structure of seven episodes, rather like chapters in a book, and to guide the choice of content we collected responses at various practice teaching events, using this preamble:

Mark Doel and Tarsem Singh Cooner are working on a project to develop new materials in the field of practice teaching and learning. 'A Virtual Placement' will make use of the new technologies (interactive CD-rom and/or website) to create a virtual reality in which students and practice teachers can prepare for placements by experiencing some of the challenges, dilemmas and accomplishments of learning practice in an agency setting.

In order to create materials which will be of wide interest to practice teachers and students, we are canvassing your views. The materials will focus on generic issues of teaching and learning, not the specific content of child care practice, mental health work, community care, etc. Bearing this in mind, what kinds of issue, dilemma or 'story-line' would you like to see included?

Please take a few minutes to write your ideas down, and add your name and a contact if you're happy for us to follow up.

The following sample reflects the kinds of response we received:

• Help students 'sort the wheat from the chaff' in terms of the information they need to collect on an interview (an interesting resonance with the wood-and-trees metaphor we finally decided on).
• Develop reflective practice skills
• Role play situations
• Responding to angry/aggressive/frustrated service users
• 'What if?' scenarios to bring out anti-oppressive issues
• Can it be Pathway specific?
• Probably more valuable in the ‘virtual’ environment of college than the real placement.

Since the basic architecture of the program was guided by the wood-and-trees metaphor, we decided to house each episode in a separate Tree. We felt that the explorers needed guides in the wood, to give a sense of security and provide interest; and once the decision had been taken to use animation rather than videoclips (reasons explained later), we developed a rather unformed idea of woodland creatures, which became known as Treebies. (Dendron was also considered, but this sounded foreboding for woodland creatures who were intended to befriend the explorer). Although Treebies would not take human form, they would have human personalities and the situations they face would parallel situations which students will face. The explorers might suspend disbelief with regard to the setting, but we supposed that they would demand realistic social situations and authentic human responses.

The scripting took place over a number of months and included directions for the animation, with suggested sound and visual effects; indeed, it was more screenplay than script. A breakthrough came with the concept of a WordPhoto, a kind of camera that takes pictures of the explorer’s thoughts and feelings and records them for the future. In effect, the WordPhoto device is similar to a learning diary, but it fits nicely with the sense of a journey in a strange land, and a way of keeping memories. In this case the memories are not of the virtual world of the Wood, but of the virtual world inside the Explorer’s mind, and the WordPhotos seek to capture not the physical world of landscape but the internal world of thought, feeling and theorising.

Technical issues
It is one thing to imagine the pages of a script and another to realise it in electronic form. Given our resources, we knew that the product would be more ‘South Park’ than ‘Shrek’. In any event, a Disney-like production would be inappropriate.
The decision to base the program in the form of a downloadable web-based piece of software was arrived at after much discussion and exploration of the distribution methods open to us. The two major principles that influenced our decision were based around the need to make the program available at no cost and to ensure that it was as widely accessible as possible, to promote good practice. Having decided upon this approach we began to develop the architecture of the program. This process involved the construction of the overall storyline as already described, linked closely with an eye to its final implementation into a piece of interactive software.

The seven Trees that form the overall program allowed us to construct distinct episodes to be downloaded separately. This was an important aspect of the overall web strategy. Our initial goal was to ensure that the download time of the program should be no more than twenty minutes over a narrow band (common household modem) connection. We were forced to revise this strategy once development of the program began; no matter which methods we employed to compress the material, the file sizes continued to grow due to the comprehensiveness of the topics we intended to cover. From the beginning of the project we had to make trade-offs between appearance, file size and the quality of the final output.

Due to the innovative nature of the delivery method, we soon realised that our web strategy had to evolve rapidly alongside the quick evolution of the project itself. We enclosed the first two Trees in the first download of the program, which allowed us to keep within our initially agreed twenty-minute download time limit. This approach meant that we had to re-think our approach to delivering the remainder of the Trees, and to achieve this goal we created a download centre, where the user could obtain the remaining Trees one by one as they progressed through their quest. Although not our first solution, it did allow us to keep the needs of the script as a priority over and above the technical constraints of the method of delivery.

In delivering 'A Virtual Placement' over the web we had a choice of two programs, either 'Macromedia Flash' or 'Director' (www.macromedia.com). Both are becoming standard for delivering content over the web, and both have advantages and
'Flash' creates very small file sizes that allow for faster download times and provides a greater level of animation control. Unfortunately, its programming language, 'Actionscript', lacks the power of the more complex and powerful 'Lingo' programming language of 'Director'. Our project required software that allowed us to carry out the following:

- to construct a friendly program which was easy to use;
- to run the program on both Windows and Apple Macintosh operating systems;
- to develop a 'download centre' that would allow the Tree episodes to be obtained from the internet;
- to create a way of people storing and retrieving their own written material from the hard drive of their own computer.

We chose 'Director' because it provided us with the greatest level of flexibility to achieve these tasks. This choice goes against current trends in the academic community where there is a propensity to use Instructional Management Systems (IMS) to create and deliver course content to learners. These systems incorporate a number of tools that allow for course delivery, discussion and tracking of learners. For more information see: http://www.imsproject.org/work$\text{public/content\ scope.html}

Whilst these systems have their strengths in easing the delivery of educational content over the web, their weakness lies in the inflexibility offered to the people creating the content, who must adhere to a set of pre-prepared templates. This tends to constrain the creative potential in developing and delivering course material.

It was for these very reasons that we decided to seek out tools that are not commonly used in the academic arena and look for a program that provided us with the flexibility we required.

Our choice meant that, as developers, we had a good deal of control over how the program looked and felt. For example, whilst every element in the construction of a computer program is important, the method employed to communicate with the program via the computer screen is very significant to its success.

It took us a considerable time to develop a system which was relatively easy to navigate, without the user becoming apprehensive, lost or frustrated by unnecessary back-tracking.
Although it is an inescapable fact that the program is a piece of computer software, our primary aim was to ensure that the technology did not hinder the learning process by being too difficult or too daunting to use. Even with experience of developing previous computer programs (Cooner, 1999, 2001), this still proved to be an enormous challenge.

Necessity and the mother of invention: Harnessing the technology

The decision to make the program web-based rather than a CD-rom ruled out the inclusion of video. The vast file sizes of any video content would make downloading the material tedious for all those without a high-speed internet connection (more commonly referred to as broadband). It was for this reason, that we decided to create animations, and this also allowed us more leeway when creating the look of the *Treebie* guides.

The use of video was not ruled out altogether; the emerging technology of 'streaming video' will be used to present short interviews with the authors on the website, in which the processes discussed in this paper are explored further. This medium has huge potential in terms of e-learning, and the power that was once held by a few television executives has now been passed into the hands of anyone who can film, edit, compress and post a video file on the internet. The potential to create short training films, documentaries, and video oral histories and then have a worldwide 'conversation' is an exciting prospect. A combination of downloadable interactive programs, internet discussion groups and 'streaming video' will be a wonderful addition to more conventional methods of teaching and learning, as long as it is used with discretion.

As creators of an animated web-based program of learning in social work, we faced very new challenges. The newness applied not just to the technology but also to the form, in terms of the limits and potential of a program of this nature. We faced something of a crisis when we tried to synchronise the mouth movements of the prototype *Treebie* with the script. Voice synchronisation proved very time-consuming and a heavy use of memory. In a pilot episode we found that it became a distraction;
there is a fine balance between a screen that is interesting and one that is a diversion from the main action. Explorers would not want to find themselves concentrating on Treebies’ mouth movements at the expense of listening to what was being said! It was at this point that we understood the true value of collaboration and its contribution to creativity. Having travelled a path from a video-based CD-rom to an animated web-based program, we were prepared for yet another shift; from the anthropomorphic images of Treebies as woodland creatures to something much more fluid and formless. It is for others to comment on the success or otherwise of the resulting ‘spirits’ (who do not have mouth movements!), but their relative indistinctiveness has the interesting effect of emphasizing the qualities of the context rather than the individuals.

Involving others In addition to the early consultation with practice teachers about content (see earlier), we also widened collaboration at the point of scripting. We have hopes that the program will be useful to other students in the wider human services, so we asked colleagues in schools of nursing, midwifery and housing to comment on the first complete draft. Their responses could not have been more encouraging and supported our view that the content was sufficiently generic to translate to other professional groups, with the exception of a few brief segments which could, ultimately, offer choices. This consultation also alerted us to other projects, such as an embryonic ‘Virtual Hospital Ward’ and an electronic discussion group (text-based online conferencing) for student midwives whilst on clinical placement. Also, during this period, the first year social work student group at UCE established a website for themselves: (http://communities.msn.com/TheWannabeSocialWorkers@UCE)

The third point of collaboration was the call for ‘voices’ for the various Treebies who populated the wood. There was no shortage of volunteers to record the audio pieces which would add such rich variety to the Treebie guides, and we are indebted to colleagues and friends for their interest in the project.
The largest consultation is yet to come. The website includes a feedback facility in which those who use the program are invited to contact us with their comments and suggestions for improvements. As well as this two-way communication between authors and users, there is a chat-room service to connect users with one another. The scale of feedback offered by a web-based program and the possibility of making ready adaptations in response to the feedback reinforced our decision not to produce the program as a CD-rom.

Possible drawbacks

Accessibility

The program is designed to be as accessible as possible; indeed, with free access (i.e. no passwords or payment) anyone in the world with an internet connection will be able to download it. However, that is also a potential barrier, in that there are still many people and worksites without net access. We hope this will be a relatively short-term difficulty, though the psychological barrier of technophobia is more intractable. The download times might also discourage some users.

Although the program is Mac and PC compatible, our next challenge is to ensure that it is accessible to people who are blind or have a visual impairment. Applications which provide voice synthesis are not always compatible.

Feedback

We hope that the feedback facility will be a significant bonus, but we also recognise the stresses of possible overload, and the potential to disappoint expectations. If feedback is conflicting it will be difficult to know how to respond, though we hope that if these issues enter the chat-room the weight of opinions will be a reliable guide as to which direction to take the program. The other drawback is that there might be no feedback!
Different uses

The format of 'A Virtual Placement' will not appeal to everyone, and those who do enter the spirit of the program will undoubtedly use it in a variety of unanticipated ways. We welcome news of these different uses and expect to learn from them. Although there is no right or wrong way to use the program, there are ways in which those who use it can gain more from it. Those who take the time to use the content reflectively are likely to gain much more than those who consider it to be a task to be accomplished as quickly as possible. Approached conscientiously, the total of 47 WordPhotos will build to an impressive album of learning and reflection, but they could also become formulaic and trite.

Conclusion

Creativity involves some risk-taking. We have found that collaborating has been a source of strength when taking risks. We approached the project with a number of shared experiences—social work practice, practice teaching, and experimenting with methods of teaching and learning. We shared a sense of fun and an interest in the possibilities of this medium. A mutual interest in story telling that encompassed both a Punjabi and English perspective played a large part in the final form of the program. We also had differences, in terms of culture and expertise in the technology itself, and these differences proved complementary and creative.

Creativity needs inspiration, and there were numerous sources, from the video booth of Channel 4's 'Big Brother' to camera techniques observed in productions as diverse as a 'Bollywood' blockbuster, 'Channel 4 News', 'South Park' and the odd soap. These all influenced the eventual look and feel of the different Trees. Treading new ground also meant a trawl of alternative literature, such as 'The Screen Writer's Bible' (Trottier, 1998) and 'Game Design' (Saltzman, 2000) to deliver our material in the way we imagined it.
Although we had very different levels of expertise with the new technology, we agreed the need to ensure that, for the greater part, the technology served us as creators rather than the other way round. Using tools that are currently employed in the games industry gave us a lot of scope, though there were still some difficult constraints, such as having to make sure the file sizes were small enough for reasonable narrow band internet delivery. We hope this early venture will encourage others to explore the potential of the new technology to create more web-based teaching materials in this field. Also, as it is tried and tested, we will learn more about its reliability as a possible means of assessment.

Learning takes place through 'conversation' and the exchange of ideas (Laurillard, 2001; Pask, 1975), and the internet allows learning conversations to take place via web-based discussion boards, even when the participants are based across different continents and not conversing at the same time (asynchronously). It can provide support, as shown by a student midwife who was newly on placement and who entitled her online entry 'Lost Piece in the Puzzle'; this elicited many responses from other students quick to offer support (Moule, 2002). Reflective observation is also well-suited to this technology (Staley and Eastcott, 1998). Although this method may not be as rich as 'live' conversation, it does allow an unusual situation in which communication is possible between authors and users. Moreover, conversations between many different users will, we hope, encourage the development of critical thinking and learning arising from the experience of using this program.

Indeed, any issues raised in this article can be explored with us on the website and exchanges can take place between the readers. This harnessing of technology creates a situation in which the reader of this article, as well as the user of the program, is no longer a passive 'recipient' of its content, but can become an active contributor to the exchange and development of the issues being explored.
At this time (early September 2002), over 300 people have downloaded the program from over ten countries. The Discussion Board is still quiet. We hope you will encourage use of the program with your students and converse with us and each other about how you find it.

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This paper presents a speculative view of the roles that a practice teacher, student and university may undertake during a practice learning opportunity in the year 2010, based upon predicted advances in information and communication technology (ICT). The article explores the likelihood of such a scenario becoming a reality by examining very briefly current developments in the area of wireless mobile devices and infrastructure.

The paper presents an argument drawing on the author's own experiences that passive acceptance or ignorance through apprehension of ICT developments should not prevent the examination and planning of how this medium may be utilised in the arena of social work in the future. This paper acts as a scenario-planning device, presenting for discussion some of the issues that may need to be explored if ICT is to become positively integrated into the field of social work education.

Keywords: Practice Learning; Scenario Planning; Electronic Learning; Mobile Communications; ICT; Internet

Introduction

Social work education in the United Kingdom is currently in the process of change; the two-year Diploma in Social Work is about to be replaced by the three-year Social Work Degree. The new degree has a strengthened practical element and a curriculum that recognises the need to develop core knowledge, analytical, recording and personal skills that will enable the delivery of high quality inter-agency based social work services to meet the changing needs of users and carers. The degree is a vocational one where students will be required to put theory and research into practice by completing 200 days in practice settings to ensure that they have the...
practical skills required to meet the National Occupational Standards for Social Workers upon entering employment. The new qualifying programmes in social work will be delivered in an environment where the social work task will be undertaken in a wider and more diverse range of social care agencies. Social work qualifying courses will have to provide a greater breadth of training opportunities to ensure that newly qualified workers are prepared for the challenges they will face throughout their careers. Qualified practitioners will also find that in striving to practise effectively within a society that is in a constant state of flux, they must embark on a journey that involves a process of lifelong post qualifying training and education. This article explores how some of these issues may be addressed with the use of ICT in the future by presenting a speculative view of a practice learning opportunity in the year 2010.

You are asked to imagine a time in which most communication will be possible through the use of handheld devices that are cheap and allow you to see and hear the person you are talking to in real time. Imagine also that these devices allow you to converse with a group of people while being wirelessly connected to a network that spans the globe. Besides opening up new possibilities for personal communication that leave the humble mobile phone far behind, this type of interaction has a strong potential to make a positive contribution to the field of social work education.

The motivations for exploring this topic are two-fold. The first is an interest in the advances taking place today in the field of mobile ICT and the possible implications they may have for social work education and practice. The second is to explore some of the issues that may need to be considered to allow the effective introduction of these predicted technological changes into the field of social work education and practice.

Charting the Route

Use of information and communication technology is not a new phenomenon in social work; Rafferty (1997) provides a brief history of the introduction of ICT into social work in Britain. Chui (2002) illustrates how computer-mediated communication is being used as a means of facilitating counselling to young people in Hong Kong. Panos et al. (2002) examine the ethical issues involved in using videoconferencing in supervising social work students on practice learning opportunities internationally. Evans et al. (2001) describe the processes of developing an online course consisting of practice exercises within an evolving virtual social work field-based setting. The author of this article has created a number of computer-based social work teaching tools that explore the issues of racism and preparing for practice learning opportunities (see Cooner, 1999, 2001; Cooner et al., 2001; Cooner & Doel, 2002). Research in the United States has also been undertaken to examine the effects of providing distance learning materials to social work students over the Internet (see Faux & Black-Hughes, 2000; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000; Kolbo & Washington, 1999). However, there appears to be little discussion into the effects that mobile
Social Work Education

devices may have on the processes of teaching social work students. Sharkey (2000) highlights how social work educators struggle to keep pace with the changes in ICT, and Sapey (1997) argues that:

… unless social workers do become involved in the ways in which new technologies are used within organisations, they will fail to influence its impact … and may further fail to control the way in which computers affect the nature of social work itself in the future. (Sapey, 1997, p. 803)

A certain level of exploration, understanding and creativity is needed if we are to ensure that any future ICT developments adhere to our profession's ethos and principles. It is important as a profession that we do not, through a lack of awareness caused by apathy, or ignorance caused by fear, simply accept the changes technology may bring.

Therefore to encourage thinking around these issues this article is in part based upon a view of the future of education as contemplated by James Shimabukuro (2002) and uses a storytelling (McDrury & Alterio, 2001) and scenario-planning approach (Gritton, 2000) to allow for the imagining of possible futures. The purpose is to initiate discussions which will develop a framework that encourages strategic thinking by extracting and analysing some of the issues for social work education that this speculative scenario may present. Let's begin with an introduction to the practice teacher.

The Year 2010

Narinder prepares a teaching session for a first year social work student called Paul. Narinder is an accredited practice teacher of some 12 years experience and lives and works in Nottingham for the local social services department approximately 180 miles north of where Paul resides. Paul is one of 12 students Narinder is allocated. Making her first cup of tea for the morning she thinks back and wonders how she could have offered the diversity and quality of training to this number of students when she first started practice teaching nearly 10 years ago. Still, she must get on she thinks, only an hour before the teaching session starts and there are a number of things to prepare.

The Student

Paul has been at the practice learning office for about an hour preparing for the teaching session. Although registered for the social work degree with one of the three universities in Birmingham, he lives some 130 miles away in Southampton and 12 months into the course has never actually visited the university campus, well not in person anyway. University education over the last few years has changed radically through the steady evolution of information and communication technology. There are a number of reasons for this change, one of the most important is due to the size, affordability, robustness and reliability of wirelessly connected Internet computers.
These machines, called ICs (short for Internet computers), are about the size of an A4 piece of paper, about an inch thick and very light, they have inbuilt webcams that allow for high quality video conferencing facilities, speech recognition software for voice input and touch sensitive keypads built into the screen. Using the upgraded systems of the old 3G (Hartwig, 2000) mobile phone telecoms infrastructure, very fast wireless access to the Internet is now available for very low cost to all and the coverage is nearly 100% across the UK.

The desktop computer tied by wires to a network has now almost become a thing of the past. Paul recalls that he chose this particular degree course because the university has a reputation for aiding practice and career progression by offering a range of high quality post qualifying training and education courses to its graduates once they qualify. The initial qualifying course is also renowned for its cutting edge use of ICT and focus on practice-based teaching that includes input from a richly diverse range of user/carers and qualified social work practitioners from the city of Birmingham. This was another reason why Paul chose this particular course, as Birmingham has a population of some one million residents, 33% of whom are of non-white descent. Conversely, in Southampton only about 2% of the population are of non-white descent thereby limiting Paul's practice learning opportunities of working with families from diverse communities.

Jenny, Paul's onsite mentor enters the room, warmly smiles at him and tries to reassure him, don't be so nervous you'll be fine. Although virtual education has become a major player in the field of higher education and life long learning, social work education still strives to ensure that practice learning opportunities remain within the realms of 'real life' experiences. Paul is based in a community mental health team in Southampton and Jenny and Narinder jointly supervise his practice learning through the use of ICs. As part of his learning agreement, in the first weeks Paul initially shadowed Jenny and other workers in the team to get an introduction to the type and range of work they carried out. Paul has been working with a number of service users under the direct supervision of Jenny and although his progress has been quite satisfactory, Southampton has not offered Paul the opportunity to develop his knowledge and skills of working with people from diverse communities. Jenny and Narinder know that if they do not provide him with this variety of learning situations he will not pass several aspects of his core competencies. In the past such learning opportunities in areas like Southampton were severely limited, however with the use of ICs this situation has altered radically.

Back in Nottingham Narinder takes her tea and goes into her office. Normally she would do this type of exercise from home but today she has agreed to help induct a new colleague. She grabs the IC from her bag and sits down and checks her email. List all messages, she instructs the IC, the implementation of the Semantic Web (explained below) now allows a level of voice interaction that was unheard of just a few years ago. On the screen a number of messages instantly download, she looks quickly and decides to answer them after the teaching session. Provide video link to Warren at the university, she instructs the IC, and after a short pause Warren appears in a small box on the top right of the screen. Hello, we are ready this end.
Kam is already here, do you want a word? Yes please, replies Narinder. Kam is part of the Suresearch group (Davis, 2002), which consists of a number of mental health service users contributing to the development of research and training in partnership with the university in Birmingham. Narinder greets Kam and goes over the teaching aims and objects of the exercise with her again. They've used this session a number of times and always tweak it to the learning needs of the individual students.

Changing Face of Education

In Southampton Jenny leaves the room giving Paul time to gather his thoughts and prepare for the teaching session. Paul is part of the computer literate generation (Reid et al., 2002) that went to school during the late 1990s and the early part of this century. After a slow start the accessibility of networked computers in the home and in schools became almost universal. The low costs of the early ICs meant that the digital divide in the UK and beyond was almost immediately eradicated. Paul and his peers had been educated with the expectation that schoolwork could be produced in a variety of digital or written formats. The submission of a 1,000-word essay or a three-minute digital video presentation was not unusual (Sweetlove, 2001, cited in Reid et al., 2002). The new social work qualifying degrees around the country now had a majority of these digital media literate students. The stumbling blocks in terms of cost, access and practicality of computer hardware that had been an impediment to creating completely online university courses rapidly disappeared and the students who entered universities now had an expectation that a proportion of the course would consist of interactive learning via the Internet. Following the introduction of ICs the social work courses underwent a radical transformation. The options offered for online learning via the ICs produced a number of opportunities that university staff used to enhance social work teaching. Online learning meant individuals with relevant skills could be recruited from across the country to provide course input. Many prominent members of staff at different universities around the country are much sought after by all social work courses and with appropriate agreements provide specialist input into a number of other programmes. Teaching at universities has changed, the days of lecturers standing in front of a room full of students transmitting their knowledge have all but disappeared. Students are now spread over the whole of the UK and are taught in tight integration with practice teachers like Narinder. (Although the course can be delivered to anyone anywhere in the world, issues of national standards, legal frameworks, language, etc. are still stumbling blocks the course providers are in the process of resolving.)

The New Web

The university in Birmingham has 100 students on each of the three years of the course. Teaching is delivered via live Web broadcast videos and interaction takes place on a discussion forum after the broadcast. Teaching sessions by the lecturer act as a precursor to virtual training scenarios where the students are actively encour-
T. S. Cooner aged to put the theory of their teaching into practice. For example, a session on childcare law is generally followed by a case study that allows the students to exercise the knowledge they have gained in a virtual work-based context. Early proponents of this type of approach (Evans et al., 2001) found that the staff time required to provide dedicated feedback to each student about their individual performances made it impossible to integrate too many exercises into a course. However, in recent years with the introduction of the Semantic Web (Port, 2002), lecturers using the latest evidence-based research have found it easier to locate and load a variety of 'probable' outcomes to the virtual learning tasks set for students. This has meant that the computer, within the parameters set by the lecturers, provides much of the workload required to feedback to the students about their individual performances. The Semantic Web interface has made information retrieval much easier by including an intelligent agent that recognises the boundaries of the type of information previously retrieved from a particular search. This means that based upon the type of information examined previously, the intelligent agent builds a recognition pattern whereby irrelevant information is omitted from search criteria unless specifically requested. The introduction of this intelligent agent has made the retrieval of relevant information much easier. Following the virtual exercises, small group discussions via the ICs explore the issues raised by the exercises; lecturers are able to randomly select small groups and set tasks for feedback to the larger group. This facility enables the students to interact with their peers across large distances in real time. A number of additional sources such as reading lists, further interactive exercises, Web-based video documentaries, legislation websites etc. are provided for further study. These latter elements have allowed the students a high degree of autonomy and encouraged self-directed and self-paced learning.

User/Carer Input

A major strength of the online course has been the level of carer and service user input in developing the core skills and abilities of the social work students. This participation vividly illustrates the universities' move away from a purely transmission model to one that encourages critical thinking and reflection (Laurillard, 2001). Volunteers from groups such as Suresearch permit students to virtually shadow their experiences of using services (with the appropriate permissions of all involved), allow them to access 'a day in their life' and take part in creating teaching exercises that enable trainee social workers to develop competence, especially in interviewing, assessment, risk assessment, case co-ordination and investigation skills.

Practice Learning Co-ordination

The Practice Learning Taskforce (PLT), although initially planned as a short-term project, has evolved into an important organisation which ensures that the wide geographical location of social work students does not pose a problem in terms of finding practice learning opportunities. The fact that the members of the PLT are all
former practice teachers and training managers helps to ensure that all the practice learning opportunities offered are assessed in terms of the quality of teaching/learning the students will receive. A fundamental principle of all social work courses is to provide students with live practice learning experiences. Although much of the theoretical and academic input is via ICs there has never been a move to make the practice learning of social work students anything other than live learning experiences.

In recent years, the Practice Learning Taskforce has influenced statutory and voluntary agencies to provide lower caseloads, additional pay and a recognised career progression path for its qualified practice teachers. Use of ICs has meant that using onsite mentors and assessors has allowed practice teachers to develop practice curricula and learning opportunities (such as the virtual learning section described below) that would have been unheard of previously. In partnership with universities, local agencies and private training consortiums the Taskforce has ensured that the appropriate number of practice teachers and practice learning opportunities are found for students whilst monitoring the quality of learning opportunities offered.

Virtual Learning

Paul has prepared for the teaching session by completing the reading set for him by Narinder and has explored the issues inherent in providing appropriate services to the black communities by using a number of virtual simulations available in the Web-based virtual social work library. The virtual simulations available to him on the Web have pre-programmed responses to make him reflect on his practice, but he feels a little nervous today because this time the responses will be those of an actual service user. Incoming call, the IC announces. Hi Narinder, says Paul looking at a video image of her in his IC unit, how are you? I'm fine how are you? Paul discusses some of his apprehensions and Narinder tries to put him at ease. They go through and agree the learning objectives of the exercise. Paul has agreed to allow his practice-learning group (five other students from his year) to observe the teaching session. The students are spread out all over the country and log on one at a time into their communal network. Although all the students have taken part in similar exercises Narinder still goes over the issues of confidentiality and ground rules for the session. A short streaming video prepared by Kam provides Paul and the practice-learning group with background details to the case study. The video also provides the context and the point at which Paul will begin the teaching session. Once everything is ready Jenny joins the proceedings, Narinder prompts everyone to connect their virtual 3D glasses (see www.x3dworld.com for an early prototype) into their IC units. These glasses provide the impression of being in a room, by moving your head the images relayed to the glasses move in time giving the sense of being in a three-dimensional environment. The glasses also relay major body movements and changes in facial features. The graphics are of low quality in terms of providing details of the room because the server based at the university is programmed to focus on providing a clearer image of facial features and body
movement. The only people present in this room currently are Paul, Jenny and Narinder. At Narinder’s request Kam appears and is introduced to Paul. At this point she and Jenny disappear into the ether and Kam and Paul begin the virtual role-play. The objective of this exercise is for Paul to have the opportunity to work with an Asian service user experiencing mental health problems so that he can become aware of the broader personal, cultural and institutional issues inherent in attempting to provide appropriate services to this user group.

At the end of the hour-long virtual role-play Narinder appears and helps them both debrief. She then invites the practice-learning group and Jenny to join them in the 3D environment. In rapid succession six other people appear. Having everyone there allows Narinder to observe the facial features and body movements of her students as first Kam is asked to feedback her impressions of the session to Paul and the group. Paul then has his turn and the events of the exercise are opened up for further discussion with everyone present.

At the end of the teaching exercise, only Paul, Jenny and Narinder stay connected. They remove the 3D glasses because the server at the university is booked for another session. Jenny shares Paul’s IC and they take the time to consider the learning that has taken place and fill in some of the missing parts of the competency document. Once complete Narinder signs off and goes to meet the new member of staff she is to induct. Paul talks to Jenny for a while about the exercise. It is not the first time he has used a simulation, we use them all the time as part of the teaching at the university he explains to Jenny. What was different this time, he says, is the fact that there was that additional fluidity and emotion that only an interaction with another human being can produce. Even though I know she was many miles away I was aware that my actions or inactions might cause her hurt or offence. With the pre-programmed simulation I used last night from the diverse communities module I didn’t really have the additional worry of dealing with another human being’s emotions. I mean it’s there at the back of your mind but when you are dealing with another person it’s amazing how you really begin to feel like it’s real practice. I think Kam gave me some good pointers and I appreciate the fact that she made me aware of a number of things I didn’t do in relation to her particular situation and mental health issues with Asian service users in general. We can re-run the simulation again and go through some of those issues if you want, before your next supervision session with Narinder offers Jenny. Yes I’d like to do that replies Paul. I’ll tell you what, he adds, it has really made me think.

Organisational and Personal Implications

The scenario shared in this article is based on a situation in which there is a tight integration between the university, placement agency, practice teacher and student to achieve a meaningful teaching environment. The introduction of audio and video enabled mobile technologies may in the future render the physical presence of a student at a university superfluous. The ability to teach, provide practice learning opportunities and practice teachers within a wide geographical spread will mean that...
the role of organisations such as the Practice Learning Taskforce may take on a completely different function. They may become negotiators that facilitate practice learning opportunities between regions for student placements if geographical location no longer affects which university the student attends. Without a co-ordinating organisation the potential of wirelessly connected mobile devices providing a diversity of teaching opportunities may not be fully realised.

The scenario presented here also suggests that social work students of the future will be provided with potentially broader learning opportunities. Use of virtual shadowing, simulations, and access to a Semantic Web that accurately and swiftly provides appropriate evidence-based research and policy information can help to develop good practice. However, current methods of distance learning may leave students feeling isolated, especially if they miss out on the friendships, support and camaraderie they can develop when they meet other students on a daily basis.

Although physical proximity does not of itself guarantee positive social learning experiences and the ICT developments explored in this paper may well change this situation by offering potentially better methods of interaction between students and lecturers that the students may have already become familiar and comfortable with. Although Reid et al. (2002) suggest that these students of the future will be more ICT literate, universities need to be proactive in exploring what new teaching methods this medium can provide to improve the development of socially aware, reflective and research minded social workers. The development of practice-learning groups of six or more students encouraged to carry out group work tasks, research, presentations and assignments may overcome some of the shortcomings of the 'social aspects' of distance learning. However, the teaching objectives and the development of a practice learning curriculum that is not restricted by the learning opportunities offered by a single physical placement can mean that students may be generally better prepared to work within a variety of settings due to the diversity of experiences they can access.

Precursors to the 2010 Technology

The scenario shared in this article rests on assumptions made about developments in four areas of current technology, namely, the development of the Semantic Web, the likelihood of an Internet Computer (IC), future cost implications, and wireless networks. While some readers may feel inclined to skip this section and go onto the conclusions, they should consider that a wider understanding of technological issues can help us all control and influence the future impact of technologies on the delivery of effective social work education.

The Semantic Web

Tim Berners-Lee is credited as the person who invented the World Wide Web while working at the Centre for European Particle Research (CERN). Port (2002) in his article 'The next Web' describes how Berners-Lee is currently working on the next
T. S. Cooner generation called the Semantic Web. By 2005 he hopes to begin replacing the current Web with a smart network that will finally understand human languages and make computers as easy to work with as other humans. The main funding for this project is through the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which he heads. The ultimate goal is for every computer connected to the Internet to have access to all the knowledge that humankind has accumulated. One of the major attributes of this system will be the ability to search the Web by deploying intelligent voice-activated agents to explore the thousands of websites and filter out only relevant information. If this system works it will mean that people will no longer be forced to sift through pages of superfluous information. There is a huge debate within the industry at the moment as to whether such a system can ever be developed. If such a system does come online the potential for productivity and access to relevant knowledge will have a profound impact on how social work practice is taught and practitioners kept up to date.

Internet Computer (IC)
The IC in this article is a small, relatively cheap, portable and wirelessly connected computer that allows two-way communication via speech, sound, sight, touch and the written word. Early precursors to the ICs are already in existence in the form of hybrid mobile phone/PDAs such as the O2 XDA or the Orange SPV mobile phone that include software applications from Microsoft which allow you to work on the move. There is also the Nokia 3650 mobile phone that allows you to capture and send video, the Sony Ericsson P800 that has a Web browser, email and camera for taking and sending pictures, not to mention the number of phones that currently allow picture and multimedia messaging all for under £300. It is this particular line of consumer development that has influenced writers such as Cohn (2001), DeJong (2001), Johnston (2002), and Buyukkokten et al. (2002) to believe that because these devices offer the ability to transmit and receive voice, text, sound, pictures and video messages through wireless connectivity, they have the potential to become the ‘learning tools’ of the future. It is from these developments that we may see the evolution of the cheap and powerful IC type appliances proposed in this article.

Cost Implications
There is a general consensus within the computer industry that 80% of users only exploit 20% of the desktop PCs available features. On this basis the mobile industry is producing prototypes of handheld devices that allow access to the functions most people require, namely the ability to surf the Web, compose and send messages, enable two way audio and video communication and access to standard word processing, spreadsheet and database programmes. This rationalisation has meant cheaper production costs because fewer software and hardware components are required to build the PDA/mobile phones that we see today.
In terms of wireless networking, mobile phone companies have realised that the cost of a continuous dedicated connection based on the principle of a voice call would make Internet access too expensive. Some companies therefore have opted for the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) system. This service provides a continuous link to the network but only charges you for the data you send or receive. For example, using this service if you downloaded an email you would only be charged for the time it took for the data to arrive from the network to your handheld device. You will not be charged for the time you take to read the email because the data will already be in your device. If you choose to reply, you will only be charged for the time the data takes to transfer from your handheld to the network. The communications industry is working on a network design that will enable reasonable rates for access.

The fact that ICs will be personally owned items may take the obstacle of IT equipment cost away from agencies. However, this aspect will also lead to a loss of control in relation to how these personal devices are used for training purposes. Access to service user records, etc., must remain within the realm of the organisation to ensure confidentiality, adherence to the data protection laws, etc. These systems will co-exist side by side.

Wireless Networks

The practice learning opportunity proposed above relies upon the existence of a widespread infrastructure that wirelessly links handheld devices (ICs) to the Internet. At the time of writing there are already some examples of wireless university campuses coming online around the world (see http://www.acck.edu/Note-BookList.html for a list). These institutions are using not only laptop computers but also PDAs to diversify their teaching approaches. Research into the uses of wireless devices (Bolan, 2002) is also beginning in places like the Edmonton-based Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

Currently there are three systems that can offer wireless connectivity. One is via a system called 802.11 (wi-fi), another is called Bluetooth and the one used as an example in the above scenario is the 3G mobile-phone system (3G stands for third generation mobile phone systems). DeJong (2001) speculates that within the next few years the system will be able to transfer data at the rate of 2.4Mbps, which in real terms means that all the text contained within this journal could be downloaded to your IC in just over a second [see Santamaria & López-Hernández (2001) for more in-depth technical information about these technologies]. Although the rollout of these systems has been slow, the intention to provide high-speed wireless Internet connectivity is a major goal of the telecoms industry.

Conclusion

Is the scenario presented in this paper unrealistic within the given time frame? There are, of course, pitfalls to speculating on the future. However, given the technical developments explored above, it is within the realms of probability that some of the
issues raised will come to fruition in one form or another. While a detailed examination of every point raised in the scenario is beyond the scope of this single article, we should consider at least some aspects that have relevance today and can contribute to the development of new knowledge. It is important that social work education is not caught unprepared by the mobile revolution. For example, there is a need for forward thinking in the areas of policy and practice development, any person today with a modern computer and a cheap webcam can download a piece of free software called ivisit (www.ivisit.com) and talk to anyone with the same equipment and software anywhere in the world for the cost of an Internet connection charge. The ability to see and hear loved ones and colleagues separated anywhere from a few miles to different continents has made this site a major attraction for people across the world. It is feasible that this technology can be used today to teach social work students, indeed researchers such as Boyer (2001) and Jerome et al. (2000), because of the potential this technology offers, have called for a greater use of the Internet to deliver social work supervision services in the United States. This process cannot be implemented without prior thought, and Panos et al. (2002) suggest that a protocol be devised to address the ethical and practical issues involved in supervising social work students using this Internet based method. Chui’s (2002) exploration of the implications of social work counselling using computer mediated communications also suggests that there is a need to develop a code of practice that governs the use of ICT in teaching and service provision situations. The American Psychological Association has already devised a statement on professional relationships mediated not only via the telephone but also via the computer; there is a strong argument to suggest that the social work profession should also consider the development of a similar mechanism. The existence of current technology alone justifies the need for further research to inform the development of policy and practice guidelines that consider not only the ethical and professional issues for teaching social work students, but also potentially how this technology may be employed to work with service users who could choose to exercise their right to use it.

A scenario-planning forum with a working knowledge of current processes, a potential for speculation and fluid planning and reflection processes can all play a part in seeking to ensure that new information and communication technology is appropriately applied to support the social work task. The challenge for all areas of social work education must be to continually monitor and evolve its processes to ensure that the impact of this new technology supports the principles and ethos of the profession.

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Dialectical Constructivism: Reflections on Creating a Web-mediated Enquiry-based Learning Environment

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This paper illustrates and evaluates the evolution in teaching and learning of a module that prepares first year MA social work students to work with members of Britain's diverse communities. The development from a 'traditional' didactic to a constructivist approach based upon Moshman's theory of dialectical constructivism is examined through the implementation of web-facilitated enquiry-based teaching practices. It is argued that to prepare students to work in situations of diversity, a 'knowledge banking' approach is inadequate. Instead, teaching and learning processes that encourage students to engage in critically reflective practices, allowing them to question existing knowledge, beliefs and feelings, will equip them with the problem-solving skills required to work in highly fluid situations. A detailed analysis of how web-based technologies, integrated into an enquiry-based teaching and learning approach, can develop these skills through knowledge construction is explored.

Keywords: Blended Learning; Constructivism; Dialectical Constructivism; Diversity; Enquiry-based Learning; WebCT; Web-mediated Dialogue

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to share some teaching experiences that will hopefully contribute to debate in the field of higher education about blended learning through computer assisted techniques influenced by constructivist theories of teaching and learning. We will explore the development of a Diverse Communities: Implications for Professional Practice module delivered to 43 first year MA Social Work students in the UK. It is argued that a constructivist approach focusing on knowledge construction as opposed to knowledge transmission is better at preparing students to gain the
skills required to work in situations of diversity. Particular focus is given to the application of Moshman's (1982) theory of dialectical constructivism within a computer assisted learning environment. Although this illustration is set within the context of a Masters professional training programme, it is felt that the teaching and learning experiences and implications outlined here are applicable to a broader higher education audience.

Teaching About Diversity

Being aware of the personal, cultural and structural inequalities that members of Britain's diverse communities can face in obtaining equality of access to appropriate social care services has featured strongly in the requirements for qualifying in social work in the UK (CCETSW, 1995). The Department of Health Requirements for Social Work Training (DOH, 2002) highlight the need to:

- Ensure that the principles of valuing diversity and equalities awareness are integral to the teaching and learning of students. (DOH, 2002, p. 11)

The General Social Care Council Codes of Professional Conduct and Practice for Social Workers (GSCC, 2002) and the National Occupational Standards for Social Work (TOPSS, 2002) highlight the importance of promoting equal opportunities for service users and carers and respecting diversity, different cultures and values.

The Diverse Communities: Implications for Professional Practice module on the two year MA social work course at Birmingham University has aimed to help students appreciate how members of minority communities experience access to social work services. The teaching has endeavoured to ensure that they understand:

- Social work demands flexibility in the helping role, a willingness to appreciate and learn from other cultures, and skills to intervene in divergent cultural settings. (Ewalt et al., 1996, p. xi)

For a number of years the diverse communities module at Birmingham employed a didactic teaching style; it began with two days of lectures presenting and exploring the psychological and sociological aspects of understanding difference in society. There followed a number of day-long lectures by individuals from diverse communities with links to the social work course. In these sessions the speakers attempted to 'transmit' in a day, neat segments of specific knowledge about quite diverse and complex communities. Whilst these lectures provided students with interesting insights into the presenter's view of their particular community, student feedback showed a level of discontent based on the following factors. There was inconsistency in the material being delivered by lecturers and guest speakers; this highlighted a lack of integration between the overall theoretical frameworks presented and the consequent views expressed by the external presenters. Students expected the guest speakers to spoon feed them essential facts about the communities being presented, very few opportunities (due to time) were provided for the development of analysis and reflection in critically exploring and challenging the guest speaker's views.
interpretations of their community. Finally, worryingly, feedback suggested that most students were anticipating the delivery of a comprehensive but homogeneous account of each community, thus failing completely to recognise the issue of diversity within different communities. Taylor (1996) remarks that the quest for certainty is particularly powerful in subject areas that are less familiar to students at the beginning of professional courses, and as a consequence, student assignments suggested that many had acquired an unhelpfully simplistic and stereotypical grasp of the communities they had been studying. This approach did little to equip them with the skills required to work with diverse communities before entering their first period of field practice. This situation required a radical rethink of the teaching and learning methods employed by this module.

Mama (2001, p. 374) illustrates, ‘there is a growing recognition that social work education must focus on a cross-cultural perspective in teaching rather than providing students with only ethno-specific material’. She highlights the following three important elements that students and practitioners must grasp before they can practice from a cross-cultural perspective. First, there must be an understanding of one’s own culture and its relationship to the culture of others. Second, students must be able to gain knowledge of other cultures in a way that is meaningful to the context and task, and third there must be recognition that diversity is a normal aspect of life in every culture. Within this framework there is an acceptance that to include appropriate content and practice opportunities for challenging oppression and discrimination, there are a number of challenges for the development of pedagogy. Dominelli (1996), Garcia & Melendez (1997), Barsky (1995), Van Soest (1994), Singleton (1994), Burgess et al. (1992), and Burgess (1992) have focussed their literature and research on finding methods that appropriately raise the awareness of, and sensitise students to the forms of social exclusion and oppression faced by members of diverse communities. Examining this literature and reflecting on our own experiences, it became apparent that a didactic approach was wholly unsuited to our teaching aims or the learning needs of our students.

Towards Dialectical Constructivism

Recognising the need to change our teaching and learning approach there were a number of pedagogical issues that required rethinking. Our first step in this process was the development of a new set of aims based partly on Mama’s (2001) findings. Three broad aims were formulated; these were to ensure that by the time the module was completed students would be in a position to appreciate that diversity is a normal aspect of all communities, students would have developed an understanding of how their own culture influences their perception of ‘the other’, and thirdly they would have developed a broad appreciation of the social, cultural and institutional barriers faced by members of Britain’s diverse communities in achieving equality of access to appropriate social work services. The learning objectives would be developed by the students themselves using an Enquiry and Action Learning (EAL) model (detailed below).
The decision to change our teaching/learning approach and adopt a set of new methods for the delivery of the module could not be carried out in a theoretical vacuum; experience of the didactic method had illustrated that students expected a fixed description of a community that they could apply to all of its members while failing completely to take on board the issues of heterogeneity. The theory that helped shape our eventual teaching approach borrowed heavily from Dialectical Constructivism. These theoretical principles suggested that to meet the aims of the module students should have the opportunity to go out into the local areas to explore, engage, question and reflect on the experiences particular communities had of accessing social work services. An effective implementation of this process demanded a mechanism for students to share their experiences with each other and tutors through some form of continuing dialogue.

Adopting a theoretical perspective is meaningless unless you are able to test whether it works by means of predicting an outcome. Based upon the aims outlined above we predicted that by the conclusion of the module, compared to previous years, students would be in a position to produce evidence that they had gained the rudimentary experience/learning required to recognise that diversity is a normal aspect of every community, be in a position to identify the influence their culture has on their understanding of others and finally, begin the process of developing an understanding of some of the barriers minority communities face in accessing appropriate social work services.

Constructivism

While a comprehensive discussion of constructivism is beyond the scope of this article, a brief introduction is necessary to understand the underlying theory that influenced the teaching methods employed. Within the realm of teaching, constructivism as a theoretical and philosophical foundation represents a move away from the traditional methods of 'passive, teacher-dominated approaches emphasizing recall and regurgitation' (Crocco, 2001). Constructivism takes on a more flexible, culturally relative and introspective perspective in which knowledge is personal construction based upon social experience. According to Fosnot (1996):

Learning from a constructivist perspective is viewed as a self-regulatory process of struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as a human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and further negotiating such meaning through cooperative activity, discourse and debate. (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix)

Constructivism emphasises the active role played by the individual learner in the construction of knowledge, the primacy of individual and social experience in the process of learning and the awareness that the knowledge attained may vary in its accuracy as a representation of an objective reality. An important point to recognise is that this theoretical perspective changes the nature of teaching and learning from one of search for 'objective truth', to one of search for 'valid perspectives'. This was
one of the most important points that engaged our interest in this theory in relation to teaching about diversity.

There are several types of constructivism; Moshman (1982) has labelled the three main interpretations of the constructivist view by placing them in a continuum, defining the poles as exogenous constructivism and endogenous constructivism with dialectical constructivism in the middle as a moderate position.

A brief exploration of the two poles reveals that exogenous constructivism emphasises the 'external' nature of knowledge. This view presupposes that 'reality' is knowable and a successful teaching/learning event will result when a lecturer is able to help a student internalise an accurate reconstruction of the external reality. On the other end of the spectrum, endogenous constructivism emphasises the 'internal' nature of knowledge. Knowledge is constructed not from external 'experiences' but from earlier internal mental structures; learning or the acquisition of knowledge is the reorganisation and reconstruction of old knowledge structures in the light of new experiences. This type of constructivism is associated with Piaget's (1973) theory of cognitive development that emphasises the role of discovery and exploration as activities or experiences that foster changes in internal mental structures. Endogenous constructivism presupposes that external 'reality' is unknowable.

Moshman (1982) proposes that dialectical constructivism lies between the exogenous constructivists' transmission of knowable external reality and the endogenous constructivists' discovery of personal internal reality. We favoured the dialectical position because it emphasises the interactional nature of knowledge. Here, knowledge development is seen as the interaction between the learner (internal knowledge) and the environment (external knowledge). Basically, learning takes place through a process of building internal models of external structures filtered through and influenced by one's prior experiences, beliefs, culture and language based upon interactions with others and direct instruction. If knowledge in this instance is information about how to engage with a community to provide appropriate social work services, the dialectical constructivist position would mean that that information can only be obtained through the process of interaction with that community via dialogue bringing to the forefront language, culture and context (Dewey, 1896; Gergen, 1995; Vygotsky, 1986). In this instance knowledge cannot exist in the head of one person alone because it can only be born between people collectively searching for an answer. The resulting answer will be adaptive and socially determined in nature and difficult to be inappropriately applied to all within a given community, hence, potentially reducing the possibilities of negative stereotyping.

Enquiry and Action Learning

Adoption of this theoretical base then required its application through the selection of appropriate models of teaching and learning. We required a blend of methods that enabled context, discovery, dialogue, interaction and reflection with the communities.
being explored. After extensive research as a teaching team we felt that an EAL approach would meet some of the requirements because it allowed students to experience what Laurillard (2002) calls situational learning. Laurillard suggests that learning that occurs in realistic situations can help develop an appreciation and understanding of real-world activity. Cree & Davidson (2000, p. 92) illustrate the common features of EAL as:

Expressed most simply, learning is based on study ''units''—scenarios and problems encountered in practice—rather than on subject-based courses. Students in EAL work together in small groups on a case study that derives from social work practice. Their task is to find out as much as they can about this particular ''case'': identifying useful resources, setting learning objectives, breaking down the work into manageable tasks and coming to a decision about the appropriate course of action for the ''case''.

Taylor (1996) outlines the achievements of approaches in which students learn from and with each other in small groups by working on real life problems and engaging in a process of reflection and dialogue based on the knowledge and experiences they have encountered. However, critics such as Coles (1991) point out that while the problem-based learning approach may be potentially more effective than traditional teaching methods, there is a chance that students may not engage in elaborated learning. Coles makes clear that elaborated learning is an important process that enables students to make links between different knowledge areas, this is crucial for the ability to transfer learning to new situations. Coles suggests that for elaborated learning to take place three conditions must be met: Students must have an appropriate context for learning; they must be provided with or acquire information potentially relatable to that context and they should have opportunities to so handle information that they make connections. (Coles, 1991, p. 315)

The concept of contextual learning is provided as a means of enabling students to engage in a process of elaborated learning while allowing them to receive the knowledge they need to know. We felt that a problem-based scenario (illustrated below) would provide the context; material prepared by the staff group (to be handed out at the outset of the module) would provide the basic information necessary to begin the task, and engagement with the scenario and continual dialogue and reflection would provide the opportunity to make the connections required to develop the appropriate learning.

Re-thinking Design and Delivery

The above issues came together to influence the subsequent changes to the design and delivery of the teaching; the plan was to utilise a blended approach to achieve the aims of the module. The blend included some face-to-face teaching, the adoption of an EAL approach and the implementation of web-mediated communications. The following description illustrates how this was undertaken.
Preliminary Work

The decision to adopt an enquiry-based component meant the teaching team had to get together to look at the formation of seven study groups before the beginning of the module. Care was taken to ensure that there was an appropriate mix of ethnicity and gender that reflected the larger group. Also, no student was placed in a group where they could come under pressure (due to their ethnic origin) to become the 'expert' for the community under study. Using the findings of an IT survey we had carried out at the beginning of the year, we made sure every group had at least two members with unmetered Internet access at home. This was to ensure that the web-based tasks for the module could be completed.

A Blended Design

The module was delivered in five distinct stages:

1. To begin with, face to face lectures in the first one and a half days of teaching introduced students to the principles of enquiry-based learning, and introductions to the psychological and sociological basis of understanding difference in society. Each of the lectures was supplemented by online learning resources and activities. During this period students were also trained to use WebCT.

2. The students were formally split into their study groups and allocated a member of staff as facilitator. The City of Birmingham (containing one of the most diverse populations in the UK) was used as a context for a problem-based task and each of the groups was given one of seven ethnically defined communities within particular wards of the city to explore.

3. The groups were instructed to keep an online reflective log of their activities, highlighting their level of knowledge at the beginning of the module and their consequent development through dialogue as they completed their set tasks. This facility was also to be the primary means of communication between groups and tutors (this is explored in more detail below).

4. At the end of the module all the groups had to provide a half-hour presentation to staff and peers. The presentations consisted of three stages: the first to present their findings; the second to reflect on their learning via their group log; and the final element provided space for students and staff to ask questions about the presentation/findings.

5. Assessment was via a 3,000-word essay based on the enquiry-based task.

The Enquiry-based Scenario

The scenario the students engaged with was worded in the following way:

You are a social work team based within the area you have been assigned. A recent report has highlighted that the community you have been allocated is either unaware of the existence of your services or faces barriers in accessing them.

Your task is to go out into the community to find out more about:
Their origins, local history, social and economic circumstances, etc. …

What barriers they face in accessing your services, e.g. cultural appropriateness, service criteria, advertising, physical access, etc. …

What changes need to occur to enable your community to gain equality of access to appropriate social work services?

In engaging with the scenario students would have to set their own learning objectives, identify useful resources, co-ordinate work within the group and present a set of appropriate solutions. These activities would allow the students opportunities to develop:

- conceptual knowledge (knowing that—facts, theories and propositions)
- procedural knowledge (knowing how—skills)
- strategic knowledge (knowing what to do when)
- personal knowledge (knowing about their own values and belief systems)
- professional knowledge (knowing about social work's values and codes of practice). (Cree & Davidson, 2000, p. 92)

**Resources**

Braye et al. (2003, p. 485), in developing an enquiry-based approach to the study of law in social work, observe ‘Given the novelty, volume and complexity of information inherent in the subject … it is also appropriate to provide students with baseline information from which to proceed in their learning’. They elaborate on the need to develop a ‘map’ like structure that enables students to begin their enquiries and grasp ‘the fluidity of the subject and develop map-reading skills so they can find their way to coherent solutions’ (Braye et al., 2003). Early development allowed us to collate and make available a number of paper based resources (alongside an extensive reading list) such as reports, chapters from relevant books and journals to enable students to access the relevant knowledge required to begin their tasks. A number of contact details were provided of ‘consultants’ working within the statutory and voluntary sectors in Birmingham whom students could visit. Web-based materials, including a page of 52 local, national and international websites relating to the communities under study, were supplied from the outset of the module. These resources created what Drinan (1991) refers to as a ‘directive curriculum’ alongside a problem-based approach.

**Integrating Web-based Communication**

It was felt that for the appropriate level of dialogue to exist between students and staff members a means of communication that went beyond the traditional seminar and lecture based contact had to be explored. An investigation of WebCT revealed a number of communication possibilities. The aim of adopting this facility was to create a setting in which participants could have greater opportunities to share learning, experience, knowledge, values and skills. Prior to the adoption of this facility an IT questionnaire of the new cohort revealed of the 43 students on the
course 92% had a computer at home with 86% of this group having access to the Internet (those students who did not have access to the Internet at home were made aware of the facilities that existed on-campus for them to participate fully in this aspect of the module). These figures allayed some of the concerns about students being unable to engage in web-based dialogue. The teaching team also successfully gained a Learning Development Unit (LDU)1 grant to access training in the use of WebCT. The majority of this training consisted of becoming familiar with the communication facilities and learning how to moderate discussion forums. The author (who was already familiar with the WebCT environment) was responsible for additional training and creating the on-line content.

The challenge to integrate web-based communication into an enquiry-based approach was made easier by implementing the following steps:

- The rationale for using web-based communication was made explicit to students from the outset. It was decided that bar one observed student study group meeting, all other staff input including facilitation would take place via WebCT (unless there were personal issues that required face to face contact).
- Lectures were limited to the first two days; a morning session on day two was given over to introducing and training students in the use of WebCT.
- During the hands-on sessions, students were introduced to the university computer clusters. Here they were made aware that via this facility they had unlimited access to the Internet and WebCT. This ensured all students had free and potentially equal access to the Web.
- Students were informed that staff would be tracking their use of WebCT and there was an expectation that each person would log on at least once a week and read the contributions of all groups. Staff would approach anyone who failed to do this.
- Seven discussion forums relating to each community under study were created. The groups were made aware that they would have to post a record of their progress onto the forum in the form of a reflective group log at least once a week, before 5 pm each Friday, for the duration of the module.

Mapping the Learning

The reflective log entries on WebCT provided a potential map of the learning undertaken during the module. To facilitate this mapping the following questions were posed at the beginning and near the end of the module:

- The members of each group will be asked to keep a shared reflective document. Complete the first part of this document by answering the following questions:
  - a. As a group write down what you know about the community you have been assigned. (This can be in the form of bullet points, short sentences etc.).
  - b. Try to identify some of the factors that have influenced you to describe this community in the above manner, i.e. the different levels of awareness, knowledge etc. … in the group.
c. As a group highlight some of the barriers you feel your assigned community may face in accessing your services.

By the end of session 2 the group must post the results of the above exercises (a and b) onto the WebCT forum, in the section relevant to your assigned community. (Remember this is a group task so only one posting is necessary and can be done from home).

The final part of the reflective document had to be completed by fulfilling the following tasks:

On Friday 5th December 2003 (the week before the presentations) the groups must post onto the discussion forum the answers to the following questions to complete their reflective journals.

a. Look at the way you first described this community. What change, if any has occurred?

b. Examine your log, highlight some of the evidence that has supported/challenged the group's original description of this community.

c. Very briefly, (500 words max) as trainee social work students, describe how this exercise may aid your understanding of the social, cultural and institutional barriers faced by Britain's diverse communities in accessing appropriate social work services.

Outcome

The implementation of these changes had an effect on both the teaching and learning experiences of those involved. The tight integration of the different elements of the blended approach produced the following processes and outcomes. Moshman (1982) emphasises the importance of teachers or experts providing scaffolding and allowing peer collaboration to enhance learning. Scaffolding occurs when students develop new learning as a teacher leads them through task-oriented interactions. Depending upon the various factors, a lecturer will provide different types of assistance over a variety of levels of task completion. The objective is to allow the students to do as much as they can on their own, and then to intervene and provide assistance when it is needed so that the task can be successfully completed. Scaffolding must begin from what is near to the student's experience and build to what is further from their experience. The ultimate goal is to help the student achieve a conceptual framework where they can begin to complete similar tasks without further assistance. Using this model, scaffolding was achieved through the use of web-based discussion forums. Due to the volume of postings, of both groups and individuals (over 256 in a five week period), it is difficult to provide a small sample that will do justice in illustrating this process and the overall quality and diversity of information contained within the on-line reflective journals. On this basis only a few items from one community group have been selected to illustrate the types of contributions that enabled dialogue, scaffolding and shared learning to take place.
Completing the first element of the reflective document, the group exploring the Pakistani community made the following observations:

The general consensus within our group was that we all thought we had a degree of understanding into the Pakistani community. However, as the discussion developed it became evident that we could not clearly define the differences between this community and the Asian people as a whole.

Also:

At the end of the discussion I believe there was a degree of embarrassment regarding our collective lack of understanding into the Pakistani people.

Over the duration of the module teaching staff were able to facilitate student learning by making connections between issues such as assumed knowledge and the effects on service delivery across all communities from a personal, cultural and organisational point of view. This facilitation was enabled by posting a number of open-ended questions for groups and individuals to explore.

As the students continued their self-directed learning, nuggets of knowledge construction could be identified in almost daily postings, for example one student noted:

What has been highlighted by much of our research is the diversity among Pakistani people in Birmingham (especially between 1st and 2nd generation immigrants). You can't make assumptions about ''Pakistani people'' as if they all share the same needs due to their Pakistani origin. I guess this is also true of other peoples like asylum seekers.

Vygotsky (1978) argues that learners should be encouraged to undertake activities that go just beyond their capabilities in what he terms their Zone of Proximal Development. By using this medium staff were able to achieve this in a way that had not been possible before by asking individual students to consider issues such as:

What effect does this knowledge have in terms of helping you consider how organisations should plan to provide appropriate services?

And:

What would have influenced you to think that diversity amongst members of all communities was not a normal occurrence?

Also:

If members of the 2nd generation were born in the UK, should they still be classed as immigrants?

Where inaccurate assumptions about particular communities were made, peers were able to share their experience and knowledge, for example this group stated in their original posting that the major religion of Pakistan was Sikhism. A student of Pakistani origin was able to feedback to the group:

… got to correct you, the Pakistani community (usually) practise the religion of Islam. Think you'll find that Sikhs come mainly from the Indian community.
This posting also revealed a dilemma common to the enquiry-based model (Burgess, 1992). Since the author is from a Sikh background and was aware that the majority of people from Pakistan do not practise Sikhism should he correct this statement? To intervene at this stage would potentially deny the students the chance to obtain the information by themselves and thus prevent potential learning opportunities. Therefore the teaching team agreed that any factual errors not rectified by the final instalment of the reflective document would be dealt with (where possible) in the final feedback. However the process of voluntary knowledge sharing between study groups would be actively promoted.

In the final posting (a 500-word document) the group were able to reflect on their learning:

If we didn't have to do such a task we probably would have been working thinking that we knew plenty about the Pakistani (and other) communities when we clearly need to learn more in order to understand all the diverse groups within this country.

Also:

During this project we've come across numerous barriers that the Pakistani community face in accessing social services. These different barriers can affect all individuals differently regardless of their background depending on a number of things, e.g. whether their family are in Britain, whether they have lived here all their lives, speak the language, etc. …

The introduction of web-based communications enabled the teaching team and students to share information and experiences in a way that had not been possible before. The enquiry-based task provided the context for learning and the web and paper-based resources provided information that was relatable to the set context. Staff facilitation throughout the module in the form of exchanges and questions on the discussion forums enabled students to experience opportunities that allowed them to make connections with theory and practice. The combination of these activities created an environment where dialogue could take place and encourage elaborated learning.

In presentations staff noted a deeper sense of knowledge and understanding of the issues under study. There also appeared to be a shared understanding of the issues of social exclusion across communities, questions posed about the presentations by peers tended to be insightful and reflective as were the subsequent responses. The assessment, via a 3,000-word essay (constructed around the enquiry-based task), illustrated a greater level of understanding and awareness of the skills, knowledge and values required to provide equality of access to appropriate services for members of Britain's diverse communities. The ability to provide an environment that enabled knowledge construction as opposed to knowledge transmission appeared to allow students to acquire the experience and skills necessary to tackle situations of diversity with a little more confidence.

A questionnaire provided feedback about the student experience of using WebCT. Some of the main findings were as follows:
Students were generally very positive, describing the discussion forums as 'useful' for sharing their ideas, learning and knowledge with other groups and for developing their reflective skills.

They appreciated having the facility to record, track and reflect upon the development of their individual and group learning.

The flexibility of being able to participate on or off campus was very welcome.

Some 76% of students accessed the discussion forums off campus and 58% of the students felt their IT skills had improved since participating in this module.

Only 16% of students found accessing WebCT and the on-line resources away from campus 'hard'.

One student commented that it was difficult to keep up with the discussions because they did not have access at home.

All the students were able to 'comfortably' access WebCT on campus.

For teaching staff, employing WebCT meant being able to monitor the effectiveness of our own teaching by remotely observing and encouraging student learning. Providing a facility where students could track the progress of their own learning was considered a major asset of this approach, as was the ability to provide advice and assistance that was accessible to all groups at the same time. The postings also created a 'learning archive' that could be used by subsequent cohorts to build on learning that has taken place in previous years.

Discussion

Overall this module was voted a success by both tutors and students, the main teaching and learning aims were met and student engagement and satisfaction (assessed by the end of module evaluation form) was higher than in previous years.

One of the reasons for this response was the fact that many students felt the blended approach enabled them to relate theory and practice in a way that would have been difficult if the teaching had been purely class based. From the perspective of the tutors, the LDU grant provided the opportunity for members of the teaching group to 'buy out' time to research and redesign the delivery of the module. The time also afforded the chance to access training in the use of e-moderating and the development of skills required to implement and run the web-based component of the module. For those wishing to emulate the processes involved here, it is important to be aware that a good deal of time also needs to be set aside to plan and acquire the skills required to produce the materials for on-line delivery. A clear idea of how and where the on-line tools are to be used can focus the extent and purpose of the web training required.

Although the vast majority of the module was self-directed learning on the part of students, tutors found that the process of checking on discussion postings and replying at appropriate intervals required a time commitment slightly greater to that of preparing and delivering a series of 'traditional' lectures. The benefit of this additional time commitment was the ability to guide students through knowledge...
construction tasks that helped achieve the main learning aims of the module. The
skills acquired are now being transferred (where appropriate) onto the delivery of
other modules.

The use of WebCT did present some limitations, especially when students were
unable to access the discussion forums from home. These students felt that on
occasions they were falling behind the pace of the learning set by the remainder
of the group; however, access on-campus did alleviate this shortcoming to a
certain degree, and information sharing between students via face-to-face
meetings, telephone exchanges and text messaging also helped. Some students
also lacked confidence in using WebCT. Additional training sessions were offered
to these learners who as well as taking these lessons were being actively assisted by
the more WebCT savvy members of their learning groups to develop their on-line
skills.

Students felt that future implementations of this module would benefit from a
fairer assessment system. Instead of a single 3,000-word assignment, a more equitable
method of assessment should involve a combined mark of a shorter assignment with
an evaluation of the group contributions to the discussion forum and the final
presentations. They felt this would provide a more realistic reflection of the work
undertaken by them during the module. This suggestion is currently under discussion
by module tutors.

In comparison to the didactic approach of previous years, evidence of student
work on the Web discussion forums, presentations, group work, and assignments
suggests that the theoretical approach guiding the teaching seemed to correctly
predict that the main aims of the module could be achieved. Student activity
appeared to demonstrate a greater awareness of the fact that diversity is a normal
aspect of all communities. Overall they seemed to display an understanding that
their culture could influence their perception of different communities, and
they began to illustrate at a number of levels an awareness of the issues inherent
in providing equality of access to appropriate social work services for members
of diverse communities. The opportunity to engage in situational learning
supported by the process of web-mediated dialogue with peers and tutors
seemed to provide opportunities to construct knowledge that could positively
influence their ability and skills to reflect on their practice to promote social
inclusion. As a potential avenue for further research it would be interesting to see if
these skills were applied in first assessed practice and beyond; this would provide a
truer assessment of the effectiveness of this type of blended teaching/learning
approach.

Acknowledgements
I am grateful to Professor Ann Davis, Dr Lena Robinson, Nazir ul-Haq and Gary
Hickman at the University of Birmingham for their hard work, support and
encouragement during the development of this module.
The LDU has been set up to support the University of Birmingham's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. It facilitates initiatives that encourage pedagogic developments by funding and supporting projects that integrate flexible ways of learning and teaching into the mainstream curriculum.

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Accepted December 2004
Child Protection Teaching: Students' Experiences of a Blended Learning Design

Tarsem Singh Cooner & Gary Hickman

This paper explores lessons learnt whilst designing a three-day blended learning approach in child protection processes for second-year postgraduate social work students. This article describes the rationale and processes behind the development of a teaching and learning design that utilised web-based activities with face-to-face teaching and role-play sessions. The purpose underlying the design is to prepare students with the appropriate knowledge of legislation and policies as well as providing learning opportunities to gain the skills required to operate as critically reflective practitioners in the complex world of child protection. A social constructivist theoretical perspective governing the teaching design is outlined with the student evaluation of their learning experiences. This paper concludes that e-learning is something that can complement traditional modes of learning rather than replace them.

Keywords: Blended Learning; E-learning; WebCT; Child Protection

Introduction

The MA in Social Work at the University of Birmingham, UK is a two-year full-time course. In Year Two students choose either an Adults or Children and Families Specialist pathway. During this five-month period where 18-days teaching are university based (one day per week) and four days a week are practice based, the Children and Families pathway aims to equip students with the basic knowledge, skills and values required to practise as competent, confident and reflective childcare professionals. The module covers a range of subject matter; this paper focuses on three days (spread over a three-week period) devoted to child protection teaching.

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Social Work Education
Vol. 27, No. 6, September 2008, pp. 647–657
ISSN 0261-5479 print/1470-1227 online
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DOI: 10.1080/02615470802201721

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A blended learning approach consisting of face-to-face teaching, sequentially accessible web-based reading materials, multiple-choice questionnaires, discussion forums in Web Course Tools (WebCT) and a role-play are used to engage the students in the complexity of child protection work including the context, values and attitudes surrounding child abuse and the concepts of significant harm and risk assessment. The design aims to provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills and gain the experience required to develop a critically reflective appreciation of the processes from referral, through investigation, to the initial child protection conference.

Child protection work requires newly qualified social work staff to possess basic levels of knowledge about (multi) agency policies and procedures (Taylor et al., 2006) and child protection law as well as assessment, communication, reflection and problem solving skills. Davies (2004) highlights how some qualified social workers had such a poor awareness of child protection procedures that they thought they required parental consent before they could interview a child, even if the alleged abuser(s) were the parents. Holland (2004) found that although practitioners were good at showing how they had gathered information about child abuse cases, they had difficulty in reflecting upon how they had used these data to inform their recommendations. Barnes (2002) highlighted that social work students wanted courses that equipped them to do the job through strengthening the skills components of training such as those that can be achieved making use of simulations, observations and role-plays. Although it is acknowledged that not all social work students may gain child protection experience in practice learning settings, it is imperative that their learning in this area is effective. Due to only three days being allocated to child protection teaching, an almost automatic response would have been to design a set of didactic lectures created to 'transmit' from tutor to student 'knowledge' around child protection processes. Schön (1983) however draws attention to the fact that professional competence involves more than the application of technical expertise. Therefore a didactic approach is inappropriate because it does not encourage engagement with knowledge, allow opportunities to develop skills, nor encourage critical reflection. A design was required that enabled opportunities for our students to apply their learning, gain experience and think critically about the consequences of their practice.

Technology Enhanced Learning—Our Approach

The use of learning technologies for our social work students is (to different levels) integrated into the programme from the outset (see Cooner, 2005). Tutors have been encouraged to formally build into allocated teaching time online flexible teaching and learning activities. This approach has allowed us the time to gain experiences and reflect upon the impact of creating online teaching materials, moderating discussion forums, designing blended learning activities etc. Our experience tends to support Wheeler et al. (2000) who argue that where possible learning technologies should not be used on their own but should be incorporated with other modes of learning.
Laurillard (1993) points out that all too often in education, research into Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use has focused on how it can be used to replicate or replace more conventional modes of teaching. To critically assess the role of ICT in education she argues the focus should be on what ICT can do to usefully ‘add to’, or ‘enhance’ the teaching and learning experience. Laurillard highlights that we should concentrate in the first instance on ‘the best way to teach a topic’ and then on how computers might be used to enhance this teaching process. This paper works on the premise that ICT is something that can complement traditional modes of learning rather than replace them.

Designing Child Protection Learning

Theoretical Foundations Governing Design

Dyke et al. (2007) argue that it is important to be explicit about the theoretical foundations governing any design for learning. Mayes and de Freitas (2007) list three broad perspectives that encompass learning theories:

- Associationist;
- Cognitive;
- Situative.

Our design overlapped at different points with a number of the learning theories proposed in these perspectives but the overall theoretical influence on our approach was constructivist. This theoretical position acknowledges that every student brings an element of their own personal history, knowledge and experience into a learning encounter, and learning is emergent rather than ‘given’ or ‘discoverable’ (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). It promotes an approach based on the premise that learning arises from social practice (Scollon, 2001; Goodman et al., 2003). An important part of this process is the dialogue that takes place between students and tutors (Vygotsky, 1986). It contrasts with didactic approaches that may primarily view knowledge as something that exists ‘out there’ external to the student and therefore can be ‘given’ through the processes of ‘transmission’ (Rand et al., 1990).

Blended Learning

Valiathan (2002) highlights how a blended learning design incorporates different methods of teaching and learning and can include: computer-based and self-paced learning, events-based activities and face-to-face interactions. Laurillard (1993) argues that the most efficient way to support student learning is to use a mix of teaching and learning methods because only then is it possible to encompass the activities of discussion, interaction, adaptation, and reflection, which are essential for learning in an academic setting. Our design included splitting students into learning groups of six or less and presenting them with the following teaching and learning methods.
These sessions included short formal lectures to introduce the students to the teaching aims and objectives and a 'hands on' introduction to WebCT based activities and resources. These sessions later also explored issues raised during online discussions.

Discussion forums

A web-based child protection referral case scenario was used with a set of questions the students initially had to discuss face-to-face in their learning groups and respond to via allocated forums at set times. Students later asynchronously used this facility to engage in discussion and debate. Tutors employed these online exercises as a means of guiding and 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky, 1986) the students learning off campus. The aim was to get students to apply and develop their knowledge around real life scenarios and in the process of discussion, reflect and learn from their responses.

Online reading and quizzes

Child protection work involves possessing a working knowledge of (multi) agency roles, appropriate legislation, policies and procedures. To ensure students had access to this information we created six WebCT based reading 'segments' and related quizzes. These became sequentially visible. Students had to read each visible segment and complete the associated online quiz. They had unlimited attempts to score an 80% mark to reveal the next segment. The reason for sequencing the availability of each item was to ensure that the learner was able to build their knowledge around prerequisite concepts (Gagne et al., 1992). Conole et al. (2007) argue that tutors have to make a series of complex decisions about what tools and theories to use when creating learning activities. Although this 'teaching machine' type method (Ravenscroft, 2004) may seem out of place in a learning design that has a constructivist base, it is important to see it as one component within the overall design. This type of learning maps well to Bloom's (1956) lower-level cognitive skills development especially where, rote learning (about policy, procedure, child protection roles) is essential as a building block to higher-level learning. The contents of this section played a fundamental part in the whole learning process by providing the pre-requisite knowledge required to prepare for, and take part in, the case conference role-play on the last day. Students were informed at the outset that completion of the online reading segments and quizzes was compulsory. Monitoring of student progress and online tutor support ensured that all students completed these activities on time.

Role-play

The afternoon session of the final day was dedicated to the face-to-face child protection case conference role-play. This case scenario was a continuation of the
original referral, on the discussion forum. This session was critical because it prepared students not only for this fictional role-play but also provided experience for real life child protection case conferences.

Evaluation

Oliver & Conole (1998), Oliver & Harvey (2002) and Hughes (2003) highlight a number of issues concerned with the evaluation of learning using ICT, whether this is centred around 'skills and knowledge' measures, attitudinal surveys seeking to quantify educational 'value' or attempting to measure the 'impact' technology may have on the educational process. Whilst acknowledging that the student learning experience may be a difficult concept to measure in a meaningful way (Oliver & Harvey, 2002), we created an evaluation process that aimed to understand how the students felt the learning design had enabled them to prepare for, take part in and reflect upon their actions within a child protection case conference situation. We wanted to see how the blended approach may have had added value and what lessons could be learnt from exploring the students' own perspectives of their learning.

When exploring the issues of developing a learning design, Dyke et al. reflect, 'designs … can be developed, applied, reflected on and adapted … with the result that the ''lived'' model applied may look significantly different from the one the practitioner started with' (2007, p. 97). Evaluations have been carried out over three years and we have made significant changes over this time. For the purposes of this paper we have concentrated on the evaluation of the last cohort (2007).

Our evaluation was informed by studies in evaluation literature (Ehrmann, 1995; Cohen et al., 2000; Oliver & Harvey, 2002). It was carried out in two parts; the first is based on a questionnaire and the second a focus group interview. The questionnaire was submitted on the last day of teaching. All 32 students were given a questionnaire to gain an insight into their perceptions of the usefulness of technology enhanced learning for developing their knowledge of child protection processes and their reflective skills. The questionnaire took 15–20 minutes to complete and produced some interesting results. Twenty-eight of the students (87.5%) completed the questionnaire, 85% found it 'easy' to access the online resources with 85% stating they found it 'quite easy' to navigate their way around WebCT. Some 68% thought the online resources were 'very useful' in helping them develop their knowledge around child protection processes and 78% thought the online activities were 'useful' in helping them develop their reflective skills. Only 43% of students felt that their ICT skills such as word processing, use of email and use of a web-browser had improved following this teaching. This response would seem to suggest that the remainder of the group already possessed the pre-requisite skills.

Questionnaires by their very nature are often quite limited in helping us to understand why participants think and respond in the ways they do (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Cohen et al., 2000). To draw out meaningful conclusions a focus group was organised to elicit more detail of the students' learning experiences and took place one week after the role-play session. Qualitative data were collected from
this focus group of randomly selected students. Fourteen students took part (11 female and three male—group ratio was 26:6). The participants were from a mix of ethnicities and aged between 21 and 43 with a variety of different educational and social work experiences.

An open-ended semi-structured interview schedule was used to explore the students' experiences of using the teaching design to develop their knowledge, skills and experiences. Discussions were based on four key areas of their teaching and learning experience: the lecture based morning, the use of WebCT discussion forums, the WebCT sequentially based reading segments and quizzes, and the final day teaching and role-play. Students were asked what they thought about each section and whether this teaching had helped or hindered them to prepare for, take part in and reflect upon their actions in child protection case conferences. The focus group gave students an opportunity to describe their learning experiences in their own terms and suggest how this teaching could be further improved. The session lasted just over an hour and the discussion recordings were subsequently analysed with key themes in the data being drawn out by coding.

Lecture Based Morning: An Introduction to the Teaching Methods and WebCT Resources

Initially I thought I already have too much work to do, can't we just cover it in a lecture. (MA Social Work Student)

Initially students appeared to feel apprehensive about the use of online and group based activities. This is supported by the findings of the questionnaire that suggested 60% felt a little removed from their 'comfort zone' of lecture based teaching, with a major concern voiced about finding the time to do the online work set for them. The students also discussed the dissonance they felt about the use of computers to teach in a profession primarily focused on working with people. At the initial stages of the teaching some members of the focus group reported that they felt their ICT rather than their social work skills were being assessed. Even though the reasons behind the learning design were explained, the findings suggest that there was still a majority of students who initially questioned the use of ICT teaching methods and expressed a preference for a face-to-face teaching approach.

The actual demonstration (of WebCT) was beneficial … very well explained … the handouts helped to relieve some of the anxiety about using the technology.

Many students felt that having the ability to explore the layout of the teaching materials and tools made the design of the teaching sessions clearer. 'Test driving' the first online quiz with members of staff present also helped reduce anxieties. Students indicated that the WebCT handout created specifically for this module using graphics with step-by-step instructions was a welcome addition. Attention was drawn to the fact that using the handout during the introductory teaching session helped raise confidence in being able to use WebCT and the quiz sections.
WebCT Discussion Forums: Using a Fictional Child Protection Referral
Engaging in Dialogue and Discussion

It makes the process real and it's sometimes easier to reflect on. The use of a fictional child protection referral appeared to help the students to contextualise the background of the online case study and reading materials. It enabled students to focus their group discussions on the referral and encouraged them to reflect upon their responses before presenting them online to tutors:

Encouraged me to think far more about the information I presented.

There appeared to be a consistent view that an asynchronous method enabled the students to think about their responses before posting. Indications from the focus group suggested that the act of writing a response seemed to encourage a reflective process. As an illustration, a number of the focus group highlighted how they would think about and edit a posting a 'number of times' before finally committing it to the discussion forum.

I find it a much more effective way to learn than simply reading stacks of materials/articles.

Students emphasised that the discussions taking place between the group to complete the tasks set created a good learning experience because they encouraged different perspectives to be explored through discussion and enabled appreciation of the complexities of seemingly straightforward child protection situations. For example, taking into account the influences of gender, race and culture and differing perspectives of what constitutes 'harm' enabled them to debate and reflect upon differing points of personal and professional views. One advantage consistently mentioned over face-to-face discussions was the ability to go back, read and reflect on previous postings. A number of students commented on how discussions in a face-to-face encounter are not 'recorded' in this fashion: 'here we had a record of everything that was debated'.

Getting quick feedback was important … it kind of made you feel you're on the right track and learning the right things.

Students commented on how they had generally enjoyed taking part in the discussions and that the comments and suggestions made by the tutors tended to 'guide me in a different direction' or 'reinforce our learning' about the social work role in the process. Prompt tutor feedback to questions and online tasks was welcomed. The focus group emphasised how 'feeling we were on the right track' enabled them to relax and enjoy the work. Having access to tutors on a regular basis was seen as a positive aspect of taking part in learning activities especially while they were out on placement. This access appeared to lessen the anxiety associated with having to organise times to physically meet. The online access had the added advantage of students not having to wait until a classroom session to discuss issues with either peers or tutors. It is likely that this feedback would have...
been less positive if all the students did not have access to the Internet either from home or placement.

WebCT Reading Segments and Quizzes

Provision of information in bite size chunks allowed me to learn when I wanted to… access it in short bursts.

Students were positive about the flexible access they had to the reading segments and quizzes. A number focused on the advantages of being able to learn at their own pace and at home. A design feature commented on was the small size of the reading segments; they felt this approach allowed them to digest the information with more confidence before taking the quiz. Creating larger pieces of information to read online many felt would have had a negative impact partly due to the issues of reading long tracts of text online.

The quiz was a motivation to read the materials … it made me try to understand and then retain the information.

After early feelings of anxiety, students commented on how much they had enjoyed the 'challenge' of trying to 'pass at the first attempt'. This appeared to motivate them to take greater amounts of time to read the material before taking a quiz. An issue that caused much debate centred around members of the focus group who felt the quizzes should have been more difficult, and that the facility to have unlimited attempts to attain the pass mark should have been reduced to a low fixed number. They felt this approach might have encouraged them to take much more care when reading the materials. We felt this would have been an inappropriate approach since the purpose of the quiz was to ensure that the students had been prepared appropriately with the information for the next stage of learning. To be punitive in the way suggested would, in our view, have had a negative impact on the learning process.

In terms of the sequential information release, this was seen as a positive feature. A number of students said that if all the quizzes and reading segments had been visible they may have tackled the ones with the lowest number of questions first without considering what pre-requisite knowledge they may have required to complete the learning appropriately. Students felt that the reading segments were a good way of introducing them to what may otherwise be considered a 'dry' subject area. Using the quizzes appeared to make the process 'challenging' and enabled them to retain important information in a much more engaging manner.

In terms of using WebCT, a considerable number reported no problems of access and use. However, some students had problems due to pop-up blockers installed on their home computers that caused problems in accessing the quizzes. Although instructions had been provided about this issue, some struggled to resolve it and used alternative systems either on placement or on campus. This reinforced our view that we should not assume a generic level of IT proficiency. Another issue reported by some of the focus group was the tendency on some occasions for WebCT to 'slow
down'. This caused frustration and some students felt it impacted negatively on their learning experience.

Final Day Teaching and Role-Play: Applying Knowledge and Reflecting on Practice

It all kind of fell together … appreciated the relevance of the online activities … I felt more confident as the day went on.

Students discussed a number of issues relating to the last day of teaching. The majority felt that as the day went on they could appreciate how the online activities had prepared them for the case conference role-play. Particular reference was made to the reading segments and online quizzes in raising their awareness of: the roles of the conference chair, key worker and core group; interagency information sharing; issues around parental involvement; the social workers' responsibilities in preparing for and presenting at conference. The knowledge of these primarily legal and procedural frameworks appeared to suggest that they felt more confident in engaging in the role-play. The online discussions around the fictional referral also seemed to have a significant impact. A number of the focus group felt they were more able to carefully consider the language and particular types of questions to pose when seeking and sharing different levels of detail about the specifics of family history, procedure, referral, and evidence. Through the process of the role-play students felt able to reflect and think through the responses they could/did give to different members playing the roles of other agencies and parents. Discussion of this final stage of the process revealed that the majority of students found the preparation work online had raised their level of confidence in taking part in the role-play because they possessed an understanding of their own professional roles and responsibilities. The students felt that the mix of activities had enabled them to gain a more holistic view of child protection processes than each of the individual teaching methods in isolation may have achieved.

Conclusion

In developing child protection teaching, research by Barnes (2002), Ferguson (2004), Holland (2004) and Parton (2004) has illustrated that social work students must possess basic levels of knowledge, and opportunities to practise and acquire the skills of critical reflection. This paper illustrates how a blended learning approach provided opportunities within a short time frame for students to engage in a number of different methods that appeared to construct learning through promoting knowledge retention, dialogue and reflective skills development.

In terms of using ICT, the evaluation seems to indicate that students had a high level of anxiety when they were first presented with the teaching and learning design. However, once they took part they seemed to appreciate the more student-centred, interactive and flexible approach to learning that online resources offered. The majority of students said they found the online engagement 'enjoyable' and 'fun' and...
within reason found it allowed them to choose when they wanted to learn. The face-
to-face role-play element appeared to offer opportunities to consolidate their learning
by providing a 'real world' situation, in which they could apply their knowledge,
develop their skills and reflect upon their practice. The design of the approach
suggests that the preparation offered by the online materials and exercises provided
for a rich final role-play learning experience.

The evaluation of the students' experiences suggests that there are a number of
benefits to using web-based teaching and learning processes in situations where the
students are often geographically dispersed and teaching time is limited. It is
suggested that a blend of traditional and web-based teaching and learning processes
offers an effective means to meet the learning needs of these social work students.

To listen to an audio recording of the authors discussing their article, please visit
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Acknowledgements
We are grateful to Professor Ann Davis at the University of Birmingham for her
support during the development of this paper.

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Creating opportunities for students in large cohorts to reflect in and on practice: Lessons learnt from a formative evaluation of students' experiences of a technology-enhanced blended learning design

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Abstract

This paper examines BA Social Work students' experiences of developing their reflective skills to work with diverse communities using a technology-enhanced blended learning design. In response to growing student numbers, new teaching and learning resources were developed to provide opportunities for students to engage in reflection-in-action at critical learning stages with the support of tutors and peers. It is suggested that access to online lectures, communications tools, a workbook (to record learning development) and online video case studies can encourage students to reflect-on-action, allowing them opportunities to reframe and reinterpret existing knowledge, values and beliefs to assess the impact these may have on their professional practice when working with diverse communities. To cater for an increase in student numbers, a rationale for the learning design is outlined, and the paper then explores the lessons learnt from the students' technology-enhanced learning experiences.

Introduction

Social workers need to be aware of the personal, cultural and structural (Thompson, 2003) processes that can lead to the social exclusion and oppression of some of the most vulnerable members of society. An important part of their training includes developing the skills to reflect on how their existing knowledge, values and beliefs may help or hinder access to potentially life-changing services (GSCC, 2002). This process of reflection can often be a challenging personal journey and small postgraduate class sizes (on average 35–40 students) have previously enabled tutors at Birmingham...
The introduction of an undergraduate programme saw a large increase in the number of students (classes have doubled in size to 80) and set tutors used to small class sizes and teaching methods new challenges to design safe and effective learning activities. This paper explores how this challenge was addressed through the development of a blended learning design on the BA Diversity in Social Work Practice module.

The evaluation suggests that the blended learning design enhanced the students' experiences of developing their reflective skills, in particular in enabling them to access opportunities to reframe and reinterpret existing knowledge, values and beliefs. Feedback suggests that the students found the learning to be personally meaningful (Mayes & De Freitas, 2006). However, although benefits were identified, there were also some drawbacks to this learning approach. This paper seeks to outline some of the lessons learnt from these experiences.

Module background and aims

The Diversity in Social Work Practice module was taught in the first year (second semester, January to March 2008) of a 3-year undergraduate degree and ran for a period of 9 weeks. It introduced some of the key issues for effective practice with members of diverse communities (which as a core theme is embedded and built upon in subsequent modules throughout the Social Work programme). In the first year, the 81 students studied two modules per semester, were campus-based and attended two full-day lectures (1 day per module) with 3 days of programmed study activities divided between the modules.

A short questionnaire at the beginning of the programme (September 2007) received 75 responses and revealed that student access to computers at home is at 100%, with 90.7% (n = 68) with Internet access; also, 73.3% (n = 55) had previous experience of using a virtual learning environment (VLE) and all the students had experience of using a web browser to access Internet content. This information influenced the following approach to the module design. To provide appropriate learning activities for a larger student group the learning design of this module was completely revamped and over the 9-week period was divided into two distinct but inter-related approaches to teaching and learning. The first 4 weeks were based around technology-enhanced learning activities geared towards preparing students, working in small groups of three, to undertake enquiry-based learning (EBL) activities (between Weeks 5 and 8) in the city of Birmingham.

The teaching aims of the first 4 weeks were to prepare students to successfully undertake the EBL tasks. Therefore, online lectures were provided around theories such as power, discrimination, oppression, ideology and language along with reflective learning activities that enabled students to interrogate, test and challenge existing constructs around issues such as equality, diversity and anti-discrimination legislation. They also had opportunities to explore their assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes based...
around the six key strands of diversity in the UK: race, gender, disability, age, faith and sexuality. Finally, opportunities were provided to apply the learning to real-life-type situations to enable students to practice reflecting on and in practice.

The aim of the EBL activities was to provide students with learning opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills gained in the first 4 weeks in the community to identify processes that could either deny or enable equality of access to appropriate social care services for members of diverse communities. During the EBL stage, students also had to prepare a presentation to be posted online in the final week to demonstrate and share with peers the reflective learning they had undertaken. The assessment marks for the module were divided into three parts: 10% for the technology-enhanced exercises, 10% for an online presentation in the final week and 80% for an assignment, which was based around the module learning activities.

Developing a blended design for reflection

The changing context within higher education has seen an increase in student numbers and pressures to expand access and cut costs. This situation may create a culture that views technology as a means to overcome some of the practical challenges staff face in teaching large numbers, rather than focus on how it may be used to enhance the learning and teaching experience. The principles governing the development of this blended learning design centred around what technology could usefully add to or enhance in the teaching and learning process rather than replicate and replace.

The design is based around a constructivist theoretical paradigm that acknowledges that every student brings their own personal history, knowledge and experiences into a learning encounter, and learning is 'emergent' rather than 'given' or 'discoverable' (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The underlying approach promotes the view that learning arises from social practice (Goodman, Lillis, Maybin & Mercer, 2003; Scollon, 2001). An important part of this process is the dialogue that takes place between students and tutors (Vygotsky, 1986). It contrasts with didactic approaches that may primarily view knowledge as something that exists 'out there' external to the student and therefore can be 'given' through the processes of 'transmission'. (Rand, Binswanger & Peikoff, 1990).

The learning design explored here utilises the properties of technology-based communications and aims to encourage deep and meaningful learning to take place through what Garrison and Anderson (2003) term a community of inquiry. Their model outlines three clear components that are present in this learning design:

1. Cognitive presence—'an environment that enables learners to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry' (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001, p. 11).
2. Social presence—'the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as "real" people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used' (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000, p. 94).

Technology-enhanced blended learning design
Teaching presence—'the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes' (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison & Archer, 2001, p. 5).

Potential influences of technology on professional education—reflection, knowledge and practice

Introducing technology into professional education can have a profound impact on the processes of teaching and learning. Garrison and Anderson (2003) in outlining their community of inquiry model emphasise the need for technology in education to be used as more than a medium to 'deliver knowledge'. They argue modern communication technologies offer students better opportunities to engage in learning that enables them to construct their own meaning around the subject taught, and have the opportunity to refine and reconfirm this meaning within a wider (potentially worldwide) community of learners. Access to this wider community through the Internet is important in terms of professional education. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) illustrate that to join a profession, a student must do far more than learn about being a practitioner, but must actually become a practitioner by adopting its culture and ways of working as a means of joining its community of practice. This process of socialisation often involves the acquisition and negotiation of a broader and often quite different form of knowledge to that required in non-professional educational settings. The Internet has introduced many new dimensions to what can be described as a community and further study is required to understand how the dynamics described by Lave and Wenger may apply in this new worldwide virtual environment.

Garrison and Anderson (2003) argue that the properties of text-based computer-mediated communication illustrate some inherent and demonstrable advantages over speech in developing the skills of reflection. Reflection is a very important part of professional practice. Schön (1983) felt that practitioners, through reflection, could begin to identify and critically analyse existing understandings that have developed around professional practices and learn to reframe them for themselves. This reflective process may not stop there as these earlier engagements can lead to a further reframing or reinterpretation of their earlier understandings and may then encourage them to engage in some form of action based on the most recent reframing. Further reflection can lead to more reinterpretations, leading to a continual engagement in a cyclical process of reflection and action. Wells (1999) argues that compared with the ephemeral nature of face-to-face discussions, the written word serves better to mediate recall and reflection. However, professional education is also about encouraging effective action, and Wells acknowledges that the spoken word functions most effectively to mediate action.

While the development and delivery of blended learning designs for professional education will encompass knowledge acquisition, at the heart of the process must be its application in a context of practice mirroring real-world situations. This situative learning perspective (Mayes & De Freitas, 2006) implies a process that leads the learner from the stage of novice to expert in the field of practice through experience. The importance of experiencing and undertaking a context-specific learning event is emphasised by...
Brown and McCartney (1998), who highlight how it enables students to explore the complex relationship between knowledge, learning, thinking, reflection and action. Schön (1983) acknowledged the cycles of thought that take place and its link and impact on practice by distinguishing between reflection-on-action (reflection that takes place after practice has been completed) and reflection-in-action (reflection that takes place during practice). Using multimedia case studies, Ballantyne and Knowles (2007) demonstrate how students can be provided with unparalleled opportunities during their training to take part in this process by accessing virtual case studies in a safe learning environment. Here they have opportunities to test their professional knowledge and develop their practice skills. Students' self-reported that their learning was significantly enhanced and offered them a richer and more authentic context for learning compared with written case studies.

Creating and designing resources for teaching and learning

The following resources were designed and created by the author and piloted with members of staff prior to use with students. Feedback from the pilot highlighted areas where amendments such as additional reading materials and exercises were required. Although the following are divided into five elements, they should not in any sense be considered independent. Whichever way the resources and processes are divided up and explored, it will always be necessary to see one in relation to the others.

Online lectures

Five lectures were recorded using a lecture capture system called Echo360 (see URL: Lecture Recording. Retrieved July 6, 2008, from http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/facilities/EchoRecording.shtml). The lectures ranged in duration from 5 to 20 minutes, with an interface that provided students with a high degree of navigational control, enabling them to move to any point within the lecture (Figure 1). This system synchronises PowerPoint slides with the audio and video recordings of the lecturer and automatically creates files for immediate online delivery.

WebCT

The lectures were 'delivered' using WebCT, the institutional VLE. Several pages were created to house links to further resources on the Internet. The Mail and Discussion tools within WebCT were used for formative assessment purposes as well as enabling communication between students, and students and tutors.

Video case studies

Three video case studies created for a previous CD-ROM project were re-compressed for delivery over the Internet and embedded into the WebCT environment. The purpose was to use these to enable students to gain experience of reflective practice in a safe setting.

Student groups

The 81 students were split into 27 groups of three. The purpose of this was twofold: first, the design of the activities relied on a high level of discussion and debate in small...
groups to develop the process of reflective learning; second, working in small groups allowed students opportunities to develop team-working skills.

Workbook

A hard copy workbook was created, printed and handed out to students at the beginning of the module (an online version was also available). As well as acting as a learner guide, this document served a number of purposes. The first part provided an overview and rationale for the learning process, the second contained a step-by-step guide with instructions (and images) outlining how to access and use the functions within WebCT. The third part contained the weekly exercises the students were to undertake during each of the first 4 weeks of the module. This part contained clear learning objectives, directions for undertaking the learning activities, space to record learning and deadlines for completing the exercises.

Learning design process

On the morning of the first day, students attended a live lecture where they were introduced to the module and its resources. They were then allocated into their randomly preselected learning groups and the first weekly exercise in the workbook was explained and demonstrated by the tutor. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions about the exercises, raise concerns and seek clarification during this session. A WebCT workshop was offered in the afternoon, attendance was voluntary and only six students (out of 81) attended; the remainder took the opportunity to begin work on the first exercise. Students were not required to attend any further face-to-face lectures (other than the morning of Week 5 to discuss the EBL component of the module); all
The interaction between tutor and students was carried out online. However, students were free to request face-to-face meetings, but this only occurred on two occasions during the EBL stage when problems arose within groups.

Weeks 1 to 3

The workbook exercises for the first 3 weeks were based around four consistent steps to encourage reflection. These are illustrated using a strategy-based learning design format (Oliver, 2006) in Figure 2. To begin with, clear learning objectives and instructions along with an estimated time frame to complete the exercises were provided then:

1. Students individually or in their groups answered social work-specific questions related to that week’s learning objectives by recording their existing knowledge, thoughts, views, etc, in the workbook prior to accessing the online lecture(s).

2. After the online lecture(s) (sometimes during) students were asked to record their responses to the same questions in another part of the workbook.

3. After stage 2, they were encouraged to note any differences between the pre and postlecture responses. The purpose was to help encourage reflection, record the development of their learning and use this material for the final part of the weekly exercises.

4. To complete the weekly exercises, students had to get together (physically and/or virtually) in their groups and discuss and submit a final 500-word summary question in the workbook. This question was specifically worded to encourage students to use their earlier written responses to discuss, share, explore and collectively reflect on their earlier written responses.

Once submitted, the tutor normally responded to each summary question within 48 hours. Garrison and Anderson (2003) note that the immediacy of response is important because it promotes a supportive and secure learning environment by reducing risk and increasing acceptance particularly during online critical discourse which can sometimes be questioning and challenging. Therefore, the purpose of the immediate response was to provide a safe environment and help guide learning and encourage further reflection through additional questions, suggested activities and/or reading.

Students had 7 days between deadlines to complete the weekly exercises.

Week 4

In Week 4, the learning activities were based around three video case studies each illustrating examples of personal, cultural and structural processes that can prevent diverse communities from gaining equal access to social care services. Students had the choice to explore the case studies either individually or in their groups. On this occasion, the workbook instructed students to record their responses to questions during (reflection-in-action) and after (reflection-on-action) watching the case studies. The final summary question for this exercise had a one thousand-word limit.

Evaluation

The evaluation is influenced by Davies, Ramsay, Lindfield and Couperthwaite (2005) who focus on the works of Oliver and Conole (1998) who highlight that evaluations...
Figure 2: Graphical representation of the learning design. EBL = enquiry-based learning.
have often been focused on product development rather than their use, particularly where skills and knowledge have been difficult to measure quantitatively. Hughes (2003) argues that studies that focus only on attitudinal surveys of students have gleaned inadequate understanding about the intricate nature of the learning experience itself. One major obstacle in understanding this experience has been the failure to measure the impact of technology on the process of education. Oliver and Harvey (2002) suggest that there is also a lack of clear understanding of what this 'impact' means and where it may be found. In order to investigate the educational impact of this blended learning design, the evaluation of this module aimed to examine the students' perceptions and experiences of developing their reflective skills to work with members of diverse communities. Acknowledging that the learning experience is an 'elusive concept' (Oliver & Harvey) and difficult to measure in any meaningful way, the intention was to understand how the learners themselves viewed the resources and why. The evaluation was carried out in two stages around the delivery of the module with the design being informed by previous studies in evaluation literature (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Oliver & Harvey, 2002).

The first stage involved a questionnaire delivered to students during Week 5 of the module that returned 62 completed responses. The questionnaire, influenced by the work of Hui, Hu, Clark, Tam and Milton (2008), aimed to assess students' perception of the learning effectiveness, learnability and perceived learning community support of the technology-enhanced learning segment of the module. The results showed that even though activities of the first 4 weeks only provided a 10% mark (and involved a substantial amount of work), 82.3% (n = 51) felt this component should remain because of the learning students felt they had achieved over this period. Asked if the workbook was positive for their learning, 45.2% (n = 28) said yes and 54.8% (n = 34) replied it had a significantly positive effect on their learning. In relation to the online lectures, 37.1% (n = 23) felt it had a positive effect on their learning and 62.9% (n = 39) said it had a significantly positive effect on their learning. Asked what effect the group work had on their learning, 33.9% (n = 21) felt it was significantly positive, 50% (n = 31) felt it was positive, 12.9% (n = 8) felt it made no difference and 3.2% (n = 2) felt it had been detrimental to their learning.

Even though this exercise provided a wealth of data, questionnaires are by their very nature usually quite limited in helping us understand why participants choose to respond in the way they do (Cohen et al, 2000). Therefore, to explore meaningful conclusions about the learning experience and outline some of the lessons learnt from this module, focus groups were arranged to examine the students' views and experiences in more detail. The final stage of the evaluation took place after students received their final grades (approximately 5 weeks after the end of the module). The author collected qualitative data from two focus group discussions with 11 randomly selected students (nine females and two males). Participants were aged between 19 and 43 years, with different past social work and educational experiences. An open-ended semi-structured interview schedule was designed to explore students' learning...
experiences of using the different technologies to develop their reflective skills. Discussions focused on the following four key elements of the learning process: workbook exercises—encouraging reflection; using online lectures; tutor feedback—guiding learning; and video case studies—reflecting in and on practice. Students were asked what they thought about each element and whether these thoughts had changed since their EBL experiences and if any aspects of the design had helped or hindered them in developing reflective practice skills and knowledge. In the focus groups, the students had the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own terms and make suggestions about how the module could be improved. The groups lasted about an hour and the discussions were subsequently analysed by coding transcripts and identifying key themes in the data. To ensure accuracy, the emergent themes were sent out to the members of the focus groups for comments and feedback.

Workbook exercises: encouraging reflection

I truly enjoyed most of this ... it felt an achievement each week completing the workbook exercises. (BA Social Work student)

This student's response was a common theme that suggested this method of learning was engaging because it injected a 'novelty' and 'fun factor' into a difficult subject. Students found that writing down the questions posed by the workbook before watching the online lecture(s) was challenging because it made them think about and 'quantify' their existing levels of knowledge, feelings and attitudes about the subjects being explored. They seemed keen to emphasise that the process of comparing their pre and postlecture responses motivated them to do the exercises because it gave them a feeling of satisfaction to be able to complete the work and assess their weekly learning progress.

I'd say the whole exercise has definitely helped me reflect and question everything in much more detail, even question and analyse my own thoughts and feelings.

Students felt that watching the 'bite size' lectures was useful because they were 'to the point' and did not 'go off at tangents' and helped keep them focused on the learning activity. They suggested that the relationship of the lecture content to the specific exercises and the various questions posed by the (online) lecturer at different points made them think about and continually reflect on the content. Going through the process of rewriting their responses to the same questions after (in some cases during) the lectures helped them to reflect upon the source, influence and potential impact of their previous knowledge and beliefs. They reported that this process began to make them consider in much more detail what they thought they knew, in particular the influence of their personal history, family, friends and societal influences like the media on their beliefs and attitudes surrounding issues of diversity and equality.

Working in a group helped my learning, as I was able to learn from the views of others and discuss issues that otherwise I may not have thought about.
As this student seems to indicate, the process of group discussion was considered very important because it allowed students the opportunity to share views, experiences and collectively examine the workbook questions and contents of the online lectures. Students felt that this element of the process helped them prepare for the EBL task because it encouraged them to reflect upon their assumptions and from an early stage begin developing the team working skills they would require to complete the forthcoming module learning activities. The focus group reported that only in emergencies did they actually use the WebCT communication tools to discuss their weekly summary questions. They found the communication functions cumbersome and felt it hindered their learning. They preferred to meet during lunchtimes and after lectures to discuss and compose their weekly submissions. They suggested it took less time and they achieved a better quality learning experience because of the fluidity of the face-to-face, compared with the online environment. In all cases, students seemed to prefer to complete the workbook reflection questions individually and then bring these along as aids for the group discussion(s). Trying to arrange group meetings to view the lectures together was considered impractical and the students seemed eager to protect their independence to choose when to carry out this earlier segment of their learning.

Using online lectures

It was a good learning technique because at times I struggle to get all the notes on the lectures in class so find it difficult sometimes to think ... listening to the online lectures I was able to stop and rewind also look up words that I did not understand then think about the issues at my own pace.

Learning about the complexities of diversity in social work practice can be a challenging process and being able to control the lecture content was identified as an important characteristic to effective learning. Students explored how they used this facility in great detail and identified the following factors as having a positive impact on their learning.

The ability to stop, rewind and play a part of the lecture they did not understand, play again, stop and if need be go away and think about, contact group members, tutor or read related resources until they felt they understood the concepts under discussion was considered an important feature. Students felt that the flexibility to access the lectures 'on demand' and control the pace of learning allowed time to consider the material being delivered in much more depth. The ability to stop and walk away and think about and around topics was considered a valuable factor in reframing and reinterpreting existing knowledge, values and beliefs in light of new perspectives. Many students reported referring back to the lectures during the EBL tasks to reconsider the content on the basis of new experiences.

I was able to watch the online lectures when I was feeling motivated rather than having to go to a lecture and sit and maybe not take anything in.

A major factor that appeared to encourage effective opportunities for reflection was the ability for students to choose when they wanted to learn. One student reported listening to lectures while 'doing the ironing using my laptop and wireless connection' because 'that's the time I think best'.

Technology-enhanced blended learning design
However, some students did report occasional problems such as ‘WebCT being down’, having to compete with family members to access the home computer and having to come to the university because they lacked online access at home as factors that disrupted learning. Although some students missed the immediacy to ask questions and debate issues offered in a face-to-face lecture setting, on the whole, the flexibility of this approach was something the students valued and wanted to see built into other modules on the programme.

Tutor feedback: guiding learning

I felt I had a more personal relationship through e-mails back and forth than I would in class ... I felt confident to ask questions whereas if it was in the lectures, I may not have. As this student highlights, using the email facility in WebCT appeared to give some students the confidence to ask the tutor questions they may not have in traditional lecture settings. Exploring this issue further revealed that students felt the questions they posed to the tutor tended to relate to their own individual learning needs and therefore the responses they received felt much more personal. They suggested that this method and medium enabled them to ask sensitive questions exploring their own values without the fear of appearing to be homophobic, racist. Their experiences were that this type of personalised response from a tutor during a face-to-face lecture would be difficult to achieve, especially for those students who are not confident or comfortable in exploring sensitive issues like these in larger groups.

... some of the questions posed and feedback given did make us think again about our work ... I feel my attitude to many groups has changed including my own ... having instantaneous responses helps rather than waiting for a very long time to consider something that's no longer fresh in my head. Students suggested that tutor responses to the weekly summary questions did have an influence in guiding their learning. They said that having the feedback within 48 hours appeared to encourage further reflection because the submission and learning activities were still fresh in their minds. Feedback that made them reflect on their personal beliefs, stereotypes and assumptions were highlighted as having the most impact. Students felt that the tutor's response seemed to 'push them in a particular direction' and this gave them the confidence to look at areas that otherwise they may not have thought about or been apprehensive to explore further. This also seemed to give students permission to explore and discuss sensitive issues such as the potential basis of their own prejudices, values and feelings about people who they defined as different, and the consequences these influences may have on their practice. This guidance worked well in groups that quickly built up trust with each other. Here, the level of debate and discussion was reported to have had a fundamental effect in helping them challenge existing personal constructs and be aware of and explore these in more detail during the EBL stage.

Some students suggested that lessons for the future should include being aware that tutor feedback should always be clear, for example using a term like ‘that’s an ...
interesting perspective' without going into detail as to what 'interesting' means had a detrimental effect and caused worry within the group making them think 'we weren't on the right track'. Clear feedback was described as something that was explicit, for example 'this is an excellent piece of work because you have broken down the legislation under question and demonstrated a level of reflection by exploring the ethical impact of it on your professional roles'. Guidance to further reading and resources was especially appreciated. It was suggested, rather than create randomly allocated groups, students should be given a choice about membership because groups that did not gel had problems in discussing tutor responses because of a lack of communication, commitment and confidence in sharing their learning. This strategy may be implemented in the coming years because it may provide students with a better sense of ownership and personal responsibility to monitor and manage their own learning.

Video case studies: reflecting in and on practice

The video case studies raised a number of interesting points of discussion. Many of the students felt that this final segment of the workbook exercises helped tie the elements of the previous learning together. In particular, the sequential exploration of the personal then cultural and finally structural processes that can hinder equality of access to social care services helped them analyse and make the links between theory and their practice.

While watching the case studies I found myself actively thinking about what I would do if I found myself in the same situation ...

Students felt this resource was important because they were given an opportunity to reflect by applying their learning. Some students reported pausing the scenes to make notes and reflect on their initial thoughts and the potential actions they would take if they were presented with the same situations. All students felt that watching the case studies was not a passive activity because it made them think about their thought processes while watching the scenarios unfold, and consider the consequences of their potential actions/inactions. They felt that the experience of these exercises impacted on their learning because 'you were in the moment' and unlike written case studies it gave them opportunities to practice thinking on their feet.

The case studies helped in that they gave everyday situations and made me think about how prejudice and stereotypes influence the world around us ...

Students were keen to point out that the real-life context of the case studies made the learning relevant especially during the EBL stage of the module. Many students commented on how they had recognised some of the events because they mirrored situations they had experienced in their personal lives. Students were keen to emphasise that the case studies contextualised their learning and enabled them to reflect (by themselves and/or in their groups) on the positive or negative influences that their use of language, stereotypes, prejudices, jokes, etc, can have on their practice. Looking back at their experiences of the EBL section of the module, students were keen to outline that
the experiences gained from the case studies helped them while out in the community, draw out, reflect and begin to understand how their ethics and personal values can have a powerful impact on the life chances of the people they will work with.

No suggestions were made to improve this section, indeed it was emphasised by students several times that their experiences of written case studies compared poorly to video-based ones.

Summary
Providing learning opportunities and activities for large groups of students exploring sensitive issues in professional education can be a complex and difficult process. This learning design encompassed activities that promoted self-reflection, and reflection with others, and seemed to overcome a number of obstacles to effective learning in large groups by providing flexibility for learning, engaging exercises and context-specific activities that students seemed to be able to relate to both personally and professionally.

Rather than simply seeking to 'deliver knowledge', the use of technology within the design was focused on exploring ways in which the activities could enhance the students learning experiences through the constructivist principles of 'emergent learning'.

Evaluation of the students learning experiences suggests that the use of a workbook to guide and record learning, online lectures to stimulate thought, group work to enable either face-to-face or online discussion, swift tutor feedback and guided learning, and online video case studies to apply reflection in and on action seemed to offer students the appropriate opportunities to explore the complex relationship between knowledge, learning, thinking, reflection and action required in professional education.

There are a number of issues from a tutor's perspective that need to be considered for anyone interested in implementing a similar design. In this instance, the tutor alone designed, created and taught this segment of the module. Possessing the pedagogic, technical and content knowledge enabled the tutor to adapt the tools and approaches to the emergent learning needs of the students, one has to be mindful that this flexibility may be hindered if a team are responsible for the different elements and delivery of the teaching design. Providing good quality and immediate feedback to students did create pressure for the lone tutor, one way of improving the design could be to create a small team of social work practitioners and service users who could assist in responding online, this addition would not be detrimental to the principles of a community of inquiry.

Involving these partners and the students in the development of the teaching and learning design could also encourage a feeling of ownership of the processes and potentially enable students to overcome some of the problems inherent in group work.

The assessment marks for the module did not reflect the work the students undertook, a fairer balance would be to provide at least a 50% weighting rather than the current 20%. If we are to use technology-enhanced processes, then the assessment methods must also be adapted to take on board these changes. Where external professional bodies are involved in accrediting programmes, dedicating time to introducing changes to module assessments is required because it can be a complicated process.
Compared with previous years, the presentations demonstrated evidence of better reflective analysis and a deeper theoretical understanding of the issues that impact diverse communities. Although there was no significant difference in assignment marks, it can be argued that they may not be an appropriate measure for the full impact of learning undertaken by this design. A better gauge may be in assessing the application of the learning to practice. Therefore, an ongoing evaluation is planned to explore students' use of these module materials during their professional placements in Years 2 and 3 to assess the impact such technologies may have on their development as social work practitioners.

References


Designing for enquiry: using Web 2.0 to enable mental health service user and carer involvement

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ABSTRACT

This chapter sets the imperative for service user and carer involvement in the processes of educating mental health professionals. It begins by outlining some of the traditional barriers higher education institutions have faced in encouraging service user and carer involvement in teaching and learning. It then outlines the properties that Web 2.0 tools and processes can offer to overcome some of these obstacles. In developing effective interdisciplinary blended learning opportunities it is argued that the use of Web 2.0 alone will not ensure effective learning outcomes. The Community of Inquiry model is introduced to explore how the processes of enquiry, collaboration and communication can be embedded into the heart of interdisciplinary blended learning designs.

KEYWORDS

Web 2.0, mental health, service users and carers, blended learning, learning design, interdisciplinary education, enquiry-based learning, Community of Inquiry model.

Background

The Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health (CEIMH) is a UK Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning funded until 2010 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. One major aim of CEIMH's work has been to promote interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning across several different disciplines within the University of Birmingham, UK. This chapter is based on the lessons we have learned through working on over seventy funded projects to promote this aim. The term interdisciplinary was adopted as a means of formally acknowledging that in all
areas of our work the contributions of service users and their carers would be respected and valued (on an equal basis) to all other disciplines involved in the training of mental health professionals.

INTRODUCTION

Our project work has illustrated that successful interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning occurs when academics and students from different disciplines working with service users and carers come together to access, contribute and share in the processes of creating social, collaborative and meaningful constructions of knowledge aimed at developing effective practice. One major outcome of this work is the recognition that for successful interdisciplinary teaching and learning to take place, communication, collaboration and enquiry must be at the heart of the process. The practicalities of organising such learning opportunities between students, service users and carers has proved challenging in higher education settings in the past due to issues of time, place and access. This chapter provides an overview of some of the lessons we have learned in the process of addressing these challenges through creating enquiry-based interdisciplinary blended learning designs. In sharing the processes we undertook, this chapter has three major objectives. The first is to contextualise the imperative for mental health service user and carer contributions to interdisciplinary education while briefly outlining some of the traditional barriers higher education institutions have presented to their involvement. The second is to examine how the particular properties of Web 2.0 tools and processes can potentially help overcome some of these barriers. The third and final part of the chapter illustrates how a pedagogic framework such as the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison & Anderson, 2003) can be used to guide the social, cognitive and teaching processes required to blend Web 2.0 and service user and carer involvement into an effective enquiry-based interdisciplinary blended learning design. Due to the ongoing development of this work, the issues raised and discussed here are offered as a contribution to thinking and practice based on our experiences to date, rather than as a finished article.

INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION

Definition and ethos

It is important to contextualise the work of CEIMH by clarifying our definition of, and ethos towards the development of interdisciplinary education and practice. Building on the UK Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education definition (CAIPE, 1997 & 2006), we broadly define interdisciplinary education as occasions where two or more disciplines (the term includes mental health service users and their carers) learn with, from and about one another to improve collaboration and the quality of mental health services. Because the service user and carer community may not be recognised as a “distinct profession” we use the term interdisciplinary as opposed to interprofessional to formally acknowledge their contributions to the learning process. In all other respects there is no difference between the principles of interprofessional and interdisciplinary education and practice.

Project applications to CEIMH have to clearly outline how mental health service users and carers will
be involved in every aspect of the planning, design, delivery, assessment and evaluation of projects.

Our development process has evolved over time and we now actively work alongside applicants throughout the duration of projects to help them create enquiry-based blended learning designs that have interactive learning elements aimed at maximising collaborative working and cross disciplinary communication. Our initial project evaluation work has indicated that a successful learning design will contain situations where students from two or more disciplines do more than simply listen to the same lectures. As Hammick, Freeth, Koppel, Reeves, & Barr (2007) explain, enquiry-based interactivity in the learning process is key if it is to help develop the circumstances that will lead to effective collaborative practice and promote better care.

Involving service users and carers in teaching and learning

Mental health service users and carers tend to bring a vast pool of authentic experiences and knowledge to the task of teaching professionals. By virtue of their past involvement with services they can provide insights that can enable students from different disciplines to understand the holistic nature of mental distress and its impact on the service user, their carer and those around them. Utilising this experience in the education and training of mental health professionals can help to produce practitioners capable of working in partnership to provide improved and appropriate provision for service users and their carers (Tew, Gell, & Foster, 2004). Service user and carer involvement is not a new phenomenon, in the late 1990s consumers of a broad range of health services and their carers sought increased power, control and influence in the way services were delivered and professionals trained (Rose, 2001). Service users played a major role (Hickey & Kipping, 1998) in bringing about a situation in which the development of service delivery began to be characterised by an ethos of partnership working where the expertise of the consumer began to be recognised and valued. In the United Kingdom, government policy began to support the involvement of service users and carers in the development and delivery of health service provision and education (DOH, 2000). The principles underpinning these directives aimed to transfer power or control of aspects of service delivery, planning and education from professionals to service users and their carers (Wright & Rowe, 2005). Part of the reason for involving consumers in this process was to challenge the causes of bad service delivery based mainly on entrenched attitudes and negative perceptions held by health professionals. To begin to break down the routines that supported paternalistic and hierarchical service provision, the ultimate aim of this partnership process was to improve interdisciplinary service delivery (Happell & Roper, 2002). In the field of workforce training in mental health, the principle of collaborative working plays a prominent role, for example the first of the Ten Essential Shared Capabilities set out by the National Institute for Mental Health in England actively promotes Working in Partnership (Hope, 2004).

The Centre's approach to interdisciplinary education aims to remain faithful to the culture and value base of mental health education and practice. Through its funding of projects it actively seeks to
encourage the concept and practice of partnership working (NIMHE, 2003) between students, practitioners and service users and their carers. We've found that involving service users and carers in the education process can play an important role in developing communication, clinical reasoning and reflective practice skills as well as enabling an exploration of professional attitudes and behaviour. These experiences are mirrored in the work of Spencer, et al (2000). The Centre through curriculum development aims to reduce a culture that creates a division of "us" and "them" in which the assumption is that people with direct experiences of mental distress (such as service users and carers) are somehow different from practitioners, educators and students (Tew, et al., 2004). The aim is to "chip away" at the remnants of a professional education value base that assumes professionals need to be the "experts", and who as a consequence of their knowledge can force their understanding and interventions upon service users and carers who are assumed to lack any insight, resources or ability to promote their own recovery. We've found that where mental health service users and carers are actively involved in the teaching role, learners can benefit from the expertise their experiences bring into the learning encounter. This approach is recognised and research suggests that being taught by trained mental health service users and carers can generate new insights, reduce anxiety and increase student confidence (Babu, R. Law-Min, & T. Adlam, 2008; Gell, 2003; Wykurz & Kelly, 2002). The Centre's interdisciplinary approach seeks to promote a more holistic understanding of mental distress, its impact and possible alternative roads to recovery. A major aim of our project work is to prepare trainee health professionals for partnership working so that they see collaborative working with service users and carers "as the norm" in their post-qualified practice (Ikkos, 2003).

Barriers to user/carer involvement and shared learning

Whilst the arguments and principles supporting service user and carer involvement are clearly stated, putting them into practice in higher education has proved quite challenging. Tyler (2006) highlights how the structural and internal logistics of a University can create a number of practical barriers that can prevent service users and carers from getting involved in the process of educating students. These barriers can include practical issues of time, place and access where involvement can be prevented because of problems such as organising payments for substitute carers, providing or funding payment for travel to and from the University, paying child care costs or offering a form of payment that will not interfere with eligibility for benefits. Basset, Campbell, & Anderson (2006) also outline how the culture and processes of a University can exclude full participation. They give examples such as the notion of hierarchies of knowledge where the lecturer may feel hesitant about letting go of the "expert" role, a "wheel em on" approach where input is limited to a marginal role precluding any involvement in the development of teaching objectives or learning designs, a lack of support for new service user and carer trainers/educators, a closed shop where access to participation can be limited by who you know, rather than what you know and can offer.
The situation in relation to bringing students together for shared learning must not be overlooked. Even when there is a will to develop collaborative teaching and learning opportunities between disciplines, our earlier experiences mirrored some of the issues raised by Ross & Southgate (2000) who point out that practical difficulties in finding rooms to accommodate large cohorts, timetabling restrictions, different professional requirements and staffing issues all accounted in many cases for the lack of collaborative interdisciplinary learning opportunities in many universities. Research also suggests that in most pre-registration professional training, a “silo” approach develops hindering the professionals’ ability to work in an interdisciplinary manner once qualified (Hall & Weaver, 2001; Horsburgh, Lamdin, & Williamson, 2001; Stumpf & Clark, 1999; Tunstall-Pedoe, Rink, & Hilton, 2003). Our experiences suggest that some of the underlying concepts of Web 2.0 tools and processes when creatively used to develop enquiry-based interdisciplinary blended learning designs can help overcome a number of these practical barriers to service user and carer involvement.

WEB 2.0
Collaboration and communication

The term Web 2.0 was first coined by Tim O’Reilly (2005) and has no agreed definition. Our work in this area suggests that Web 2.0 should be thought of more as a concept than as a technology. Terms such as the “read/write web” and the “social web” have been used to describe some of its main properties. Other than its ability to connect people synchronously and asynchronously to overcome some of the barriers of time, place and access, there are a number of collaborative learning concepts behind Web 2.0 tools and processes that make it an attractive proposition for academics looking to develop interdisciplinary curricula. For example, it can enable a wide range of people to engage in the processes of enquiry by freely accessing and sharing knowledge through collaborative processes with others to consume, remix, repurpose and collectively generate new knowledge and ideas. These processes are essential for developing enquiry in learning, however before looking at these learning concepts in more detail, it is worth briefly exploring the mechanics of engaging with these sites.

Access to most Web 2.0 resources is generally achieved through a web browser such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari. Because these sites enable people to write to them, they normally require users to create an identity and log in before they can comment or upload content. An interesting point about this process is that users do not have to use their real name and thus can post anonymously. Some of the most commonly recognised Web 2.0 activities are blogging, media sharing, social networking, and collaborative working using Wikis or GoogleDocs. Unfortunately a full description and analysis of the educational properties of each of these tools is beyond the scope of this chapter. (For a more detailed account, see Mason & Rennie, 2008; Richardson, 2009).
Whilst there are many advocates for using Web 2.0 in education (CICLE, 2009; Mason & Rennie, 2008; Richardson, 2009; TLRP, 2008) there are also voices that warn against the uncritical adoption of new technologies and processes (Brabazon, 2008; Keen, 2008). They argue that a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods and tools used must be achieved before any wholesale adoption. Our own critical appraisal of Web 2.0 tools and processes (in developing enquiry-based blended learning designs) suggests there are four related properties that can aid the design of effective interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Although these properties are divided into four segments and explored here with illustrative examples, they should not in any sense be considered independent. Whichever way they are divided up it will always be necessary to see the influence of one property in relation to the others. The first property is the ability of Web 2.0 tools and services to support a high degree of communication and collaboration. Using these freely available facilities, service users, carers, students, practitioners and academics can plan teaching, share information, coordinate research/problem-based activities, engage in debate and build learning communities within a flexible environment that can be free from the traditional constraints of time and place. We found for example that using GoogleDocs online word processor as the main medium for planning and designing teaching events, reduced the need for face-to-face meetings and enabled service users and carers to participate fully in these processes by working remotely. Functions such as the share option on the online word processor allowed group members to collectively access, create, view, add, amend, save and delete content in planning and design documents. All edits were displayed in real time ensuring that the most up to date versions were always visible along with a revision history option allowing members to easily access previous documents to review progress, or amend mistakes. These functions enabled service users and carers to contribute to the planning and design process at a time, place and pace convenient for them. (For more on GoogleDocs see http://tinyurl.com/6j7ds7.) The second property Web 2.0 offers is the ability to easily create content such as text, video or audio files and then freely publish these to a select group or potentially worldwide audience. We found that the “write, publish and discuss” simplicity of Blogs (such as Google’s Blogger.com) provided an excellent medium for mental health service users and carers to develop a supportive community of practice by creating an online space to share, discuss and archive their experiences of engaging in and seeking to improve interdisciplinary teaching and learning processes. (For more on Blogs see http://tinyurl.com/2kobxs.) The third property, developing the skills of enquiry can be achieved by combining problem-based case studies with the simple collaborative functions of a Wiki (such as PBWorks.com). Utilising the Wiki link function, students were guided to additional content on the Internet. Working alongside mental health service users, carers and practitioners they learned to develop the skills required to retrieve, interrogate and assess the validity of sources they intended to use. Working as a team they used the write, edit and save functions of a Wiki to collaborate and collectively produce potential solutions to complex life like mental health situations. Exposure to these learning opportunities covers the fourth property, that of developing literacy (through experience) in using these tools and reflecting on how they could be used.
to aid effective interdisciplinary practice in the future. (To find out more about Wikis see http://tinyurl.com/23y3wp.) The collective impact of engaging with these properties also provided students with opportunities to develop the skills and confidence required to become independent learners.

In terms of designing for enquiry and enabling communication and collaboration, these properties are in sharp contrast to our experiences of using institutional virtual learning environments (VLEs). Although there are a number of attributes that VLEs possess over Web 2.0, such as a consistent user interface, the same tools for all learners, permanence in that they are not likely to go bust without warning, and access to technical support, there are also a number of elements that can reinforce the old barriers. One example is that service users and carers have to be registered with the VLE before they can take part in any teaching and learning encounters, registration can be quite a complicated and time-consuming process and prevents immediate participation. Also, Attwell (2007) points out that higher education institutions have used VLEs to “manage learning” rather than encourage open networking and creativity, the material on these systems are invariably created by tutors with little room or facility for the collaborative creation of content available in open networks. The design behind VLEs tend to mirror the old processes of teaching and learning in higher education by recreating the walls of the classroom and institution in the virtual world. These types of restrictions perpetuate the isolation of the university from the wider outside community. The philosophies behind the designs of these systems (Beetham, 2007) tend struggle to compete with the collaborative enquiry-based teaching and learning opportunities offered by Web 2.0 tools and processes.

THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY MODEL
Designing for learning
Although Web 2.0 presents viable opportunities for greater service user and carer participation, the development of effective enquiry-based interdisciplinary blended learning designs will not automatically result as a consequence of bringing these two elements together. Our experience has highlighted that the use of any new technology and educational process has to be guided by a sound pedagogic model to ensure that overall aims and objectives are met. After considerable experimentation, most of the recent interdisciplinary teaching and learning designs developed by CEIMH projects have been guided by Garrison & Anderson's (2003) Community of Inquiry (CoI) model.

We believe the CoI model has produced higher levels of learner satisfaction because it embeds blended design and enquiry into the heart of the teaching and learning design. The model has a constructivist underpinning and promotes the idea that the individual brings his or her personal history, knowledge and experiences into the learning encounter. It supports the view that learning is “emergent” rather than “given” or “discoverable” (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The model encourages
the perspective that learning arises from social practices and contrasts vividly with didactic forms of teaching that may primarily view knowledge as something that exists "out there" external to the student and therefore can be "given" through the processes of "transmission" (Goodman, Lillis, Maybin, & Mercer, 2003; Scollon, 2001). This model compliments the collaborative and social learning concepts underpinning Web 2.0 tools and processes and supports the incorporation of authentic learning experiences that service users and carers can bring into the interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning encounter. For deep and meaningful learning to occur, Garrison and Anderson (2003) argue three elements must be present when creating effective learning designs. Within the CoI framework these three elements are identified as social, cognitive and teaching presence. It is important to note that each of these three elements are interdependent and must not be seen in isolation of each other. The following account provides a brief introduction to each of these three elements. It also demonstrates how in the process of creating an enquiry-based interdisciplinary blended learning design, this model can help to structure thinking around development to overcome a number of potential organisational and cultural barriers to service user and carer involvement.

**Social Presence**

Social presence – "the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as 'real' people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000:94).

Creating a climate that encourages open communication is important for service user and carer involvement in a community of enquiry. In creating a teaching and learning design, thought must be given to the processes required to create a situation in which participants can feel free to express themselves in a risk-free manner. In a community of enquiry, this is one of the first steps required to ensure that collaboration can be encouraged to enable the sharing of experiences and practices within groups of learners. Feeling emotionally secure can enable individuals to engage in open and purposeful discourse as group cohesion and camaraderie build. In respect to service user and carer participation, developing this environment is essential on two levels. The first relates to the wider issues of involvement in the learning design process. Our experiences show that for service users and carers to project their real identities into the learning encounter, they must feel that the learning activities they engage in are authentic. To ensure authenticity means that they must be involved in every aspect of the learning and teaching design process. In an environment where planning through joint working takes place, academics must ensure that the contributions of service users and carers are valued and treated on par with other professionals. The second level concerns engagement with students. All of our recent project designs have been based on creating interdisciplinary learning groups where students from different disciplines and service users and carers from day one work as a team. In these teams, they engage in exercises that involve online and face-to-face learning activities aimed at encouraging collaboration and communication. Embedding service user and carer...
participation in this manner right from the start means that they have the same opportunities to
develop relationships within the group and ensure that their participation is present throughout the
learning process. To ensure that a successful level of sharing, debate, discussion and learning takes
place, the design has to ensure that everyone involved is orientated to this method of learning so they
are clear about their role in the process and the expectations of the tutor. A supportive learning
environment will also ensure that the well-being of all participants within the learning process is
monitored throughout the duration of the activities and if needed, access to support services is made
available. From a practical point of view funding for service user and carer participation has to be in
place along with appropriate training and support. Although very rare, where required the Centre has
provided service users and carers with access to equipment and finances to ensure there are no
barriers to taking part in online activities. All of these elements can play a major role in creating a
socially proactive environment in which service users and carers can actively engage in the processes
of teaching and learning.

Cognitive Presence

• Cognitive presence – “an environment that enables learners to construct and confirm meaning
through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of enquiry”. (Garrison,
Anderson, & Archer, 2001 :11)

In the evaluation of our recent projects most students have stated that they find mental health service
user and carer involvement has led to personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning
outcomes (http://tinyurl.com/pfgu4a ). To achieve these outcomes has required the careful design of
the learning activities. To encourage the processes of discussion and enquiry where students have the
ability to challenge existing knowledge, stereotypes, beliefs, opinions and values requires learning
activities that trigger a sense of puzzlement and debate. Interdisciplinary groups presented with
authentic problem-based case studies or digital Photo Story triggers (created by service users and
carers http://tinyurl.com/qnglom ) can be enabled to develop their learning by exploring a wide range
of issues related to mental health practice. The strengths of communication and collaboration inherent
in Web 2.0 technologies can be exploited to encourage groups to explore the issues presented through
the exchange of information. Exploiting the time and place flexibility provided by online tools such
as Wikis, mental health service users and carers can engage in sustained discussion with students to help
them reflect on their learning and connect new ideas. One of the benefits of using problem-based case
studies or digital triggers is that they can enable students in a safe environment to apply new ideas.
Where the resolution to a particular issue needs to be reconsidered, discussion and debate in a
community of enquiry can lead to the development of reflective practices and new skills and
knowledge. This process can enable group participants to share personal meaning and ask questions to
confirm understanding within a wider mental health community. Creating a climate that enables open
communication and risk-free expression is essential for this part of the learning to be successful since
it can impact on the ability of students and service users and carers to engage in the processes of supporting meaningful discourse. In selecting the content for discussion and debate, teaching presence plays an important part.

Figure 1. Image of “My Experience of Night Medication Photo Story Trigger”. (© 2009, www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk, used with permission.)

Teaching Presence

- Teaching presence – “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes”. (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001:5)
Linking the possibilities offered by Web 2.0 to enable service user and carer involvement in the teaching and learning process required a radical rethink in how we approached our projects learning designs. The CoI model was particularly helpful in guiding the development of blended learning. It encouraged a fundamental change to our teaching and learning approaches and led to a number of blended redesigns enabling a restructuring of class hours so that interdisciplinary engagement could be extended through web-based learning opportunities. The CoI model helped to support the development of learning designs that allowed us to thoughtfully examine and optimally integrate the strengths of face-to-face oral and online media communications. The aim for us was to use the strengths of each to produce learning experiences consistent with the aims and objectives of the different projects. Project partners were encouraged to think beyond the classroom walls and explore the possibilities that Web 2.0 offered to connect all the actors involved in the learning process. They were asked to consider how these facilities could change the role of students from passive recipients of knowledge, to active agents in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning. In training service user and carer colleagues to take part in this process, they were encouraged to think about guiding discussion and the implications of sharing personal meaning in an online and face-to-face environment. Being part of each process, particularly setting up the curriculum and design meant that they had a greater say and understanding of the teaching and learning processes, aims and objectives. With the CoI model guiding the development of our learning designs, we have been able to utilise the collaborative and communication facilities built into Web 2.0 tools and processes and involve mental health service users and carers in a way that would not have been possible before. The combination of these elements has enabled us to create effective learning encounters for students because enquiry, collaboration and cross-discipline communication have been at the heart of the learning design.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

With the popularity of social networking and other Web 2.0 based activities there are a number of areas that need further exploration to help build our understanding of the impact these tools and processes can have on higher education. Embedding enquiry-based blended learning practice across higher education institutions using Web 2.0 is one important area for study. At Birmingham, the Centre has worked with the Central E-Learning Team and the equivalent of the Staff Development Unit (APOD) to collectively create and deliver a two-day Designing for Enquiry-based Blended Learning (DiBL) training event to a cross section of academics. The DiBL event had the support of APOD and the E-Learning Team because the CoI model was consistent with one of the key goals of the institution's teaching and learning strategy, namely that of promoting the processes of enquiry-based teaching and learning. The Centre used its experiences to create a set of resources to make explicit, implicit knowledge about the CoI model and then trained APOD and E-Learning Team partners to use these tools. The DiBL event was designed to adhere to the principles of enquiry-based...
learning and members of the E-Learning Team and APOD took on the role of coaches to help the participants (working in teams) to learn how to create enquiry-based blended learning designs (for more information about the DiBL event see http://tinyurl.com/r3hzap). The motivation for holding this event was created through a series of presentations by the CEIMH team to senior managers. The aim was to raise their awareness of how the institution could potentially employ Web2.0 technologies to widen participation, meet the needs of a diversifying student population and address some of the challenges of funding and competing in a global education market (Bradwell, 2009). CEIMH is currently in the process of collating and disseminating a number of pertinent lessons gleaned around developing communities of practice focused on creating enquiry-based blended learning designs. Suggested future research directions related to this topic include exploring organisational cultures, processes and attitudes that can either help or hinder the development of these communities. Another area requiring further investigation is the role and methods of assessment in enquiry-based blended learning designs. Currently all our projects were restricted to the assessment methods outlined in original module specifications by project partners, these consisted primarily of assignments, examinations and presentations. If we are to use technology enhanced processes, particularly where students are expected to produce work collaboratively online, then assessment methods need to adapt and recognise the potential learning student's achieve in the production of this work. Research into student motivation, engagement with tasks and whether deeper learning occurs through these processes could help inform changes in future assessment methods. In relation to wider issues raised in this chapter, one area of particular importance is an examination of how Web 2.0 tools and processes can be used to engage service users and carers in developing and improving the delivery of mental health services out in the field. With the strengths this medium provides to enable communication and collaboration, issues such as the impact it can have on influencing future policy and practice decisions is a key area for further research. In education there is still a need for good practice guidelines in using Web 2.0 tools and processes. Research into the impact of accessibility, security, permanence, privacy, copyright, design etc from an educational institutions point of view is still in its infancy and needs to be further developed to inform good practice. Finally, from a practical point of view, answers to questions such as: “does exposure to collaborative working with mental health service users and carers during the education process result in partnership working in post-qualified practice?” Need exploration along with an examination of the factors that can encourage or impede this process.

CONCLUSION

With the current level of freely available access to Web 2.0 technologies there has never been a better time to create opportunities for service user and carer participation in interdisciplinary education. The possibilities Web 2.0 tools and processes offer in enabling students from different disciplines to share ideas, opinions and experiences with service users and carers has never been greater. The very nature of the tools and processes provided by this medium can encourage learning through the processes of
collaboration, communication and enquiry. It has been argued that the existence of these properties within Web 2.0 tools and processes alone cannot guarantee that effective and meaningful learning opportunities will occur. It's argued that the development of blended learning designs has to be guided by sound pedagogic models. Working with mental health service users and carers requires careful planning at a number of different levels so students can benefit from their involvement. Developing these interdisciplinary experiences for students in the early part of their educational processes should at the very least positively impact on two areas. The first is to make them aware of the powerful opportunities Web 2.0 can offer for future consultation in the development of services once they qualify. The second is to normalise the principle of partnership working so once in practice they can work collaboratively to deliver effective mental health services.

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18th September 2009
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Learning to Create Enquiry-based Blended Learning Designs: Resources to Develop Interdisciplinary Education

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Interdisciplinary teaching and learning in social work education can improve service user outcomes by promoting collaborative working between professionals. Educators must ensure that students are given opportunities to gain the skills, knowledge and experiences required for collaborative working. Blended learning can overcome barriers of time and place to create spaces for interdisciplinary students to engage in interactive and collaborative learning experiences. Little has been written in social work education outlining how educators can gain the competences required to develop blended learning designs. This paper provides access to a set of resources aimed at guiding educators through the complex processes of creating interdisciplinary enquiry-based blended learning (EBBL) designs. The context, ethos and rationale for the development of these resources are outlined along with an evaluation that suggests they were successful in guiding an interdisciplinary group of educators through the complex processes of creating interdisciplinary EBBL designs.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary; Blended Learning; E-Learning; Enquiry-based Learning; Community of Enquiry

Introduction

Interdisciplinary teaching and learning in social work education has long been recognised as a valuable mechanism for improving service user outcomes by promoting collaborative working between social care and health professionals (Allen-Meares, 1998; Walsh et al., 1999; Dunworth, 2007). An interdisciplinary approach is becoming part of the mainstream of health and social care professional education in the UK (Barr and Ross, 2006) and Dunworth (2007) argues that for it to be effective,
students need to be exposed at an early stage to cross-disciplinary, interactive learning opportunities to develop the skills and experiences necessary for future collaborative practice. Miers et al. (2007) highlight that these collaborative opportunities can be achieved by combining scenario-based learning with the flexibility ICT offers to connect dispersed learners. This combination, they argue, can create new virtual ‘spaces’ for students to engage in collaborative learning with service users and carers, practitioners, and students on allied professional courses. In social work education, blended learning, a mixture of face-to-face and online interactions enabling collaborative and interactive learning, has been increasingly used as a curriculum strategy and provides the basic ingredients required to facilitate interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities (Cooner and Hickman, 2008; Quinney et al., 2008; West, 2008; Pack, 2010; Cooner, 2010). However, Larsen et al. (2008) have highlighted how little has been written in the social work education literature outlining how educators can gain the technical and pedagogic skills required to create blended learning designs.

This paper seeks to address this dearth in the literature by outlining how the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health (CEIMH) created a set of resources to guide educators through the processes of creating interdisciplinary enquiry-based blended learning designs (EBBL). The context and rationale for the development of a Blended Learning Design Planner and associated Resource Pack, and Design Icons are outlined. The lessons learnt through the educators' experiences of using these resources are explored. It is suggested that these resources helped educators gain the confidence, knowledge and experiences required to think ‘outside of the box’ and creatively explore the technical and pedagogic possibilities offered by blended learning to facilitate collaborative and interactive interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities. Access to these resources is made freely available to encourage their use in the hope that it will facilitate further discussion and debate around promoting educator development in the fields of blended learning and interdisciplinary education.

Context
Social workers generally find themselves working with individuals or groups who experience multiple social disadvantages (Hill et al., 2009). To achieve successful service user outcomes, social workers will often have to work collaboratively with staff from a number of allied professions (Marsh, 2006; Dunworth, 2007). Russell (2008) argues that interdisciplinary teams are becoming more common in dealing with social problems, therefore social work education has a duty to ensure its students are suitably equipped with the knowledge and skills required to function collaboratively within such groups. Although social work training requires students to demonstrate specific learning and assessment in ‘partnership working and information sharing across professional disciplines and agencies’ (DOH, 2002, p. 4), finding ways of enabling them to do this in a meaningful way has been hindered in the past by practical issues in higher education. Problems in finding rooms to accommodate large cohorts, timetabling restrictions and differing professional requirements are just some of the...
issues that have combined to hinder the development and delivery of interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities (Ross and Southgate, 2000). These obstacles have led to a lack of interactive and collaborative learning between disciplines resulting in social care and health students struggling to work together for the benefit of service users once out in practice (Hall and Weaver, 2001; Horsburgh et al., 2001; Tunstall-Pedoe et al., 2003). Work at CEIMH suggests that web-based technologies can help to overcome some of these practical difficulties and bring learners from different disciplines together (Skorga, 2002; Juntunen and Heikkinen, 2004). Using the asynchronous collaborative properties these technologies present within a blended learning design has enabled us to help educators create new virtual spaces for meaningful interdisciplinary learning to take place (Miers et al., 2007; Reynolds, 2007; Quinney et al., 2008).

Blended Learning: Spaces for Interdisciplinary Education

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) state that effective blended learning requires educators to incorporate the following three key elements into the learning design process:

1. thoughtfully integrating face-to-face and online learning;
2. fundamentally rethinking the course design to optimise student engagement;
3. restructuring and replacing traditional class contact hours. (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008, p. 5)

A brief analysis of these three factors illustrates that they can provide a strong foundation from which interdisciplinary teaching and learning can develop. For example, integrating online and face-to-face elements allows educators to use the strengths of the former to encourage reflective and asynchronous group-working activities, whilst the latter ensures the immediacy and spontaneity of verbal interaction is retained within the same learning process (Garrison and Anderson, 2003). A course design that optimises student engagement and moves away from a purely didactic approach should also encourage learning that has enquiry at its heart. Examples include encouraging interdisciplinary student groups to seek solutions to problem-based case studies. Savin-Baden (2000) argues the processes of 'learning by doing' in these situations can provide learners with opportunities to gain experiences of collaborative working. A restructuring and replacement of traditional class contact hours can help overcome some of the time and space issues mentioned above by using technologies such as Wikis, Blogs, Social Networking Sites and Institutional Virtual Learning Environments to allow for elements of learning to take place asynchronously outside of the classroom environment (Mason and Rennie, 2008; Richardson, 2009). These technologies can also create virtual spaces where social work, and students from allied disciplines, practitioners, and service users and carers can come together, unrestricted by temporal and geographic issues to engage in collaborative and interactive interdisciplinary teaching and learning activities (Skorga, 2002; Juntunen and Heikkinen, 2004; Cooner and Wagstaff, 2008).
Innovation with technology-enhanced teaching and learning in social work education is not something new (Rafferty, 1997); social work educators have developed a number of examples of interdisciplinary blended learning approaches utilising the above elements to create designs that have resulted in effective learner outcomes. Quinney et al. (2008), writing about the development of a virtual town called Wessex Bay, describe how a blended learning approach allowed collaboration to take place between dispersed communities of practitioners, cross-disciplinary student groups, and tutors using bulletin boards, discussion forums and face-to-face interactions. Using evolving case studies they were able to collaboratively develop the skills of problem-solving and case analysis within an authentic community of practice. West (2008), describing the development of a virtual town called Clydesdale, illustrated how students could potentially engage in interdisciplinary collaboration by contextualising their learning around a number of complex social and psychological processes of lifespan development. Clydesdale was created to represent the issues of urban poverty, social stratification and the inequalities found in many cities. Using this virtual environment, students working with online case studies found they could experience and reflect upon the complex processes of assessment and decision-making they were likely to face in post-qualified practice. Not all blended learning designs need to involve such technical complexity. Reynolds (2007), using email discussion boards, illustrated how issues of professional identity development were explored by a group of geographically dispersed interdisciplinary students. Some social work educators have been quick to recognise the potential benefits that web-based technologies and approaches can offer in helping students acquire the skills required for effective post-qualified practice. Ballantyne and Knowles (2007) have illustrated, for example, how online video-based case scenarios can provide richer learning encounters compared to text-based accounts, encouraging students to reflect on issues of verbal and non-verbal cues when engaging with service users. Cooner (2005, 2010), and Madoc-Jones and Parrott (2005) have illustrated how the asynchronous properties of discussion forums are good at encouraging students to collaborate because they offer time and place flexibility to collectively explore new ideas, access different perspectives and question existing concepts. Garrison et al. (2000) in their study of learning in text-based environments, found that the processes of writing encouraged learners to spend time organising, clarifying, sequencing, structuring and reflecting on their thoughts before publishing them on forums. These actions appeared to be instrumental in helping students develop the skills of critical thinking and reflection. What these examples illustrate is that a careful blend of pedagogic knowledge and technology can result in educators being able to create interactive situations in which interdisciplinary learners can be brought together, and offered potentially rich opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge required to engage in collaborative practices.

The above examples illustrate the innovation some social work educators have undertaken to create situations in which students can experience interdisciplinary blended learning. However, other than a few exceptions (Skehill, 2003; Greig and Skehill, 2008), Larsen et al. (2008) note that very little has been written in the social work education literature outlining how educators can personally gain the knowledge...
skills and experiences necessary to create similar blended learning designs. For social work education this is an important area for exploration, bearing in mind that a Department of Health report outlined some time ago that social work educators as a whole were not fully engaging with learning technologies (Rafferty and Waldman, 2003). To address this situation within its own institution CEIMH developed a set of resources aimed at guiding educators through the technical and pedagogic processes required to create EBBL designs.

CEIMH: Resources to Create and Sustain Innovation in EBBL Designs

CEIMH is one of 74 Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) in England and Northern Ireland; since its inception in 2005 one of its main aims has been to find ways of encouraging educators to develop the technical and pedagogic skills required to create EBBL designs. One of CEIMH's primary goals has been to embed excellence in interdisciplinary mental health teaching and learning at the University of Birmingham, UK. To achieve this goal it has funded projects seeking to create interactive and collaborative learning opportunities between students on allied health and social care programmes, facilitated by academics, practitioners, and mental health service users and carers. To ensure that the obstacles of time and space do not hinder the development of these projects, many have employed an EBBL approach. CEIMH staff are experienced in developing EBBL designs, and working alongside project partners, have access to a technology-rich environment suitable for promoting the development of technology-enhanced teaching and learning projects.

Embedding Excellence

CEIMH funding ends in 2010. To embed sustainable excellence in interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and to ensure that innovation continues post-project funding, CEIMH's approach has been to make sure project partners are taught to develop the technical and pedagogic skills and knowledge required to create EBBL designs. The implementation of this philosophy has required careful development and based on evaluations of our project work, we found successful changes in teaching practice occurred when CEIMH staff provided educators with access to pedagogic and technical resources appropriate to context, enabled focussed development of learning designs that had a shared ownership, and produced digital teaching and learning resources that were authentic to intended learning outcomes. However, most of this work was undertaken in one-to-one development situations and project partners on return to departments found it difficult to sustain a change in EBBL practice without accessing further support from CEIMH staff. To address this issue a number of resources were created to make explicit the implicit knowledge CEIMH staff used to help educators create EBBL designs. The aims of these resources were to guide EBBL development so educators working independently of CEIMH staff could continue to use the lessons learnt in project work to further develop and sustain innovation in their teaching and learning practice.
Designing for Enquiry-based Blended Learning (DiBL) Resources

CEIMH staff working with a Learning Design Consultant from the School of Education and a Senior E-Learning Consultant from the Central E-Learning Team (the DiBL Design Team, see acknowledgements) created a Blended Learning Design Planner and supporting Resource Pack and Design Icons collectively referred to as the DiBL resources (see http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/newsandevents/DIBL.shtml, accessed 6 April 2010).

These resources were developed to enable educators to learn how to create learning designs that had student enquiry at their core. Experience of project work at CEIMH had revealed that the first inclination of educators when using technology was to create resources that 'delivered information'—reducing the role of the learner to a passive recipient of knowledge. A lack of awareness of the different technologies and inexperience of creating learning designs (particularly those that utilised the strengths of face-to-face and online activities) hindered educators' abilities to develop EBBL designs that promoted active student learning. Over a period of six months, the DiBL Design Team sought to make explicit the implicit knowledge they held about creating EBBL designs based on their knowledge of working with a wide range of educators and disciplines. The clear aim of these resources was to encourage educators to integrate EBBL into their work by guiding them, whether working independently or in teams to learn how to:

1. prepare learners working in interdisciplinary groups to engage in blended learning environments;
2. create digital ‘triggering event(s)’ (normally based on problem-based case studies, using freely available or cheap multimedia software) rather than use technology to simply deliver content;
3. develop activities to facilitate group enquiry around the triggering event through discussion and debate (using Web 2.0 or Virtual Learning Environments);
4. create blended learning sequence(s) to ensure learners did not become overwhelmed by online and/or face-to-face interactions; and
5. devise appropriate assessment and evaluation strategies.

The DiBL resources were created with a level of flexibility to enable educators to create anything from very short learning activities right through to planning the delivery of whole programmes. Before exploring the resources in more detail and examining educators' experiences of using them, it is important to outline the pedagogic framework underpinning their design.

Community of Enquiry (CoE) Framework

Dyke et al. (2007) state that it is important to be explicit about the pedagogic framework governing any design for learning. The development of our project work and the DiBL resources were informed by Garrison and Anderson's (2003) CoE framework which is based on a constructivist theoretical paradigm for learning.
This framework's emphasis on learning through interaction and collaboration is particularly suited to guide the development of resources aimed at encouraging interdisciplinary education. Wenger et al. (2002) define a CoE as consisting of 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis' (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). Garrison and Anderson (2003) state that to create an environment in which a CoE can fully function, a successful EBBL design has to ensure the existence of the following three presences:

- **Social presence**—'the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as "real" people (i.e. their full personality), through the medium of communication being used' (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 94);
- **Cognitive presence**—'an environment that enables learners to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry' (Garrison et al., 2001, p. 11); and
- **Teaching presence**—'the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes' (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 5).

Elements from within these presences can overlap but their existence in any EBBL design is critical to creating an effective community of enquiry whose intent will be 'to apply knowledge in action' (LaMendola et al., 2009, p. 713). The latter element of the CoE framework was considered an important factor in encouraging educators interested in developing interdisciplinary education to make greater use of the EBBL resources because at their core they promoted learning centred on experiences generated through practice.

The Blended Learning Design Planner V1.0 (http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/newsandevents/DiBLPLanner.pdf) is a tool to prepare an EBBL design. It is a complex process requiring the careful orchestration of a number of pedagogic and technical components. An A0 sized non-linear planner (inspired by the Universities Collaboration in eLearning approach to developing reusable learning objects) was created (Leeder, 2003). This planner aimed to guide educators through the processes of EBBL design. The planner is divided into the following five distinct segments.

- **The first section** covers elements of teaching presence by helping educators clarify the curriculum, teaching and learning methods they want to employ. This segment covers many of the practical issues educators have to generally agree before starting an interdisciplinary design process, such as the overall aims and objectives, topic area, collaborators (students, academics, practitioners, service users and carers), duration, focus, learning objectives etc.
The preparing for enquiry-based blended learning segment helps educators develop the elements of social presence. Here educators explore the processes required to create an environment in which participants (working in interdisciplinary groups) can engage in open communication in a safe environment. A successful implementation of this segment will encourage cohesion in groups enabling participants' opportunities to engage in open and free discussion and dialogue. The aim of this segment is to create an atmosphere in which personally meaningful learning can occur through group collaboration.

The triggering event section aims to develop cognitive presence in an EBBL design. This segment helps educators develop problem-based questions or case studies aimed at prompting discussion and debate. Educators are helped to consider how their trigger will lead to a sense of puzzlement and encourage students to explore issues and exchange ideas based on the information contained within and around the triggering event. This segment also aims to help educators start thinking about the digital tools and content they are most likely to use in the design and development of their triggering event.

The blended learning sequence segment covers the cognitive, teaching and social presences of the CoE model. Using the Learning Design Icons (see below), educators are helped to plan their EBBL sequences in minute detail. This segment also encourages educators to consider the steps necessary to facilitate and manage online and face-to-face discussions. The aim of this segment is to help educators create opportunities for participants to engage in discussion and dialogue and ensure students are provided with opportunities to develop and apply the learning they have undertaken.

The assessment section covers elements of both teaching and cognitive presences. This segment helps educators ensure the assessment elements are congruent with the EBBL designs aims and objectives (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). Educators are also encouraged to provide links to further information for students to independently explore during or after engaging with the EBBL sequence.

The final segment covers teaching presence. Educators are encouraged to put in place an evaluation strategy for the EBBL design. The addition of the glossary is to ensure contested terms between disciplines are clarified so as to avoid misunderstandings during the design and teaching and learning processes.

The planner provides a visual aid and focus for the EBBL design process. Other than the first segment, educators are encouraged to use the planner in a non-linear manner enabling them to develop and make connections between the different parts of the EBBL design process. Using simple A5 sized postcards and Blu-Tack, educators are able to write and share their ideas on the planner allowing them to make links and develop their designs through collaborative working. (Full size planner available at: http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/newsandevents/DiBLPLanner.pdf.)

During a piloting phase it became apparent that the planner required additional tools to help educators overcome gaps in design knowledge and skills, therefore the following two additional resources were created to accompany the planner.
The different segments of the Blended Learning Design Planner include references that guide educators to particular sections of this Resource Pack. This pack consists of 16 A4 fact sheets providing supplementary material intended to raise educators' awareness of the tools and processes they can employ in the development of their EBBL designs. The list of items in the Resource Pack and their relationship to the Design Planner are outlined in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planner section</th>
<th>Resource Pack fact sheets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparing for enquiry-based blended learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>Climate for learning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section A</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction to Blended Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Enquiry Based Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Orienting Students to Blended Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Setting Expectations in Blended Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Facilitating Effective Student Introductions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triggering event/Images, sound etc.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section B</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reasons for Online Discussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Case Studies: Connecting Theory to Practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Integrating Video in Blended Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blended learning sequence/Tutor facilitation/Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section C</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Student Roles in EBL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preparing Students to Participate in eDiscussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Supporting Reflection Through Blogs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Supporting Wiki Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Using Synchronous Chat for Learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment/Links/Evaluation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section D</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Creating and using Rubrics for Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improving Student Writing through Peer Review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is Evaluation?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These fact sheets provide a brief overview of each specific topic along with examples from teaching practice and links to further information. (Available at: http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/newsandevents/DiBLPlannerResourcePack.pdf.)

Learning Design Icons

A set of 57 icons was created to enable educators to visually create their blended learning design sequences. These icons are clustered into the following blended learning processes:
A number of blank icons were also made available for educators to add activities not already included in the set. These resources were made available in an electronic format and as a set of 5 cm $\times$ 5 cm laminated icons for groups to use on the floor or walls to visually develop/amend and explicitly explain the processes of their EBBL designs. On the back of all icons (except the Communication Group Roles set) a brief description of the possible activities is provided as a prompt to aid design decision-making. Figure 1 provides an example of the front and back of one set. (Available at: http://www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/newsandevents/DiBLPeterRaingerIcons.pdf.)

Software

Two quite distinct types of easy to use software tools were chosen for educators to develop their EBBL designs. The first focused on providing educators with the facility to create multimedia-based triggering events, the second concentrated on tools to facilitate and manage online discussions between groups of interdisciplinary learners.

To create triggers, the following free or relatively cheap software applications were chosen:

- Blended learning processes
- Icons
  - Instructional Content
  - Lecture/Presentation
  - Text-based Material
  - Screen Capture
  - Demonstration
  - Web-based Material
  - Audio Podcast
  - Photo
  - Video
  - Story
  - Comic Strip
  - e-Lecture/Presentation

- Interactive
  - Experimental
  - Construction/Practical
  - Enquiry/Research Exercise
  - Case Study
  - Experiment
  - Problem-based Exercise
  - Simulation & Games
  - WebQuest

- Communicative
  - Collaborative
  - Face-to-Face
  - Online Chat IM
  - Video Conference
  - Discussion Forum
  - Communities of Learning
  - Wiki
  - Collaborative Writing
  - Collaborative Concept Maps
  - Email

- Productive
  - Individual Assignment
  - Blog/Web Log
  - Audio Podcast
  - e-Portfolio
  - Student Presentation
  - Comic Strip
  - Group Assignment

- Assessment
  - Feedback
  - Direct Feedback
  - Formative Computer Aided Assessment (CAA)
  - e-Voting Activity
  - Summative CAA
  - Open Learner Model
  - Formative Q&As
  - Online Polling

- Operators
  - Timed
  - Selective Release
  - Forced Pause
  - Synchronise Communication

- Group Roles
  - Note Taker
  - Student Facilitators
  - Post-graduate Students
  - Peer Review
  - Reflective Analyst
  - Facilitator
  - Mentor
  - Chair
  - Researcher
  - Time-keeper
  - Visiting Experts
  - Critical Friend
  - Summariser
  - Lurker
  - Dominator

Social Work Education

321
The applications had basic ‘How to’ software guides on their websites and did not require high-end computer hardware to use. Multimedia triggers could be produced using items such as mobile phone cameras, consumer camcorders, digital cameras, microphones, web cams etc., using the educator’s normal desk or laptop computers.

As well as WebCT (the university’s Virtual Learning Environment), the following free online software facilities were introduced to help educators facilitate and manage communication between interdisciplinary groups of learners:

**Software Description Price**

**Audacity**
http://audacity.sourceforge.net
Creates audio files that can be output as podcasts
Free

**Comic Life**
http://plasq.com/comiclife-win
Creates comic book like storyboards
Small licence fee

**Jing**
http://www.jingproject.com
Records a maximum of five minutes of PC/Mac screen capture and audio
Free

**Movie Maker**
http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/default.mspx
Enables video editing on a PC
Free

**Photo Story**
http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/PhotoStory/default.mspx
Mixes audio, still pictures and text to create digital stories
Free

**http://www.blogger.com**
A free facility to create blogs, often referred to as an online public diary. Can be used to encourage reflection.

**http://pbworks.com**
A free facility for educators to create a Wiki, a powerful tool that can enable student collaboration.

**http://www.mind42.com**
A free facility enabling students to engage in collaborative mind mapping exercises.
from within the University of Birmingham. The purpose of trialling the resources in this manner was based on Salmon et al.'s (2008) assertion that a successful approach in changing technology-enhanced academic practice can only be achieved by creating methods that work equally well across disciplines and modes of teaching and learning. Sharpe et al. (2006) note the well-documented reluctance of some university educators to embrace changes in their pedagogy, and Becher and Trowler (2001) argue that a successful intervention has to demonstrate to academics that it is flexible enough to allow them to relate their pedagogic development to issues of learning, teaching and assessment associated with their disciplines. Being flexible enough to accommodate a strong disciplinary focus can provide the security of context to enable educators to overcome inhibitions to pedagogic change. Once change has occurred, experiences of our project work suggest that a raised level of confidence can allow educators to engage in developing interdisciplinary blended learning opportunities.
with colleagues from related disciplines based on their experiences of using a common pedagogic framework.

DiBL Event

The two-day DiBL event was held at CEIMH in April 2009 and used an enquiry-based learning approach. Twenty-eight participants working in two uni- and four interdisciplinary teams were asked over the two-days of the event to use the DiBL resources to create a digital triggering event and EBBL design. Six coaches were recruited and assigned individual teams to work with. They had a clear advisory role, they were not allowed to undertake any of the design or software development work expected of the participants. Bar the two-day time frame, using this approach the event tried to mirror as closely as possible the environment in which CEIMH collaboratively undertakes project work with its partners.

Method

To assess the effectiveness of these resources in helping educators create interdisciplinary EBBL designs, an evaluation was conducted immediately after the final activities of the two-day event. Coaches (from different teams) conducted interviews based on open-ended discussions prompted by key questions developed to ascertain participants' experiences of using the DiBL resources. For the purposes of this paper we will concentrate on the results of three questions: were the tools created and selected for this event useful in helping you learn how to develop EBBL designs, could they help you develop interdisciplinary EBBL opportunities, and what will you take away and apply in the future from the event? In their teams the participants had an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own terms. The interview sessions varied, tending to last between 30 minutes and one hour dependent on the team. Their responses were recorded and transcribed. The discussions were subsequently analysed by coding the transcripts and identifying key themes in the data (Cohen et al., 2000). To ensure accuracy, the emergent themes were sent back to the coaches for feedback and comment.

Results

Tools

Overall participants felt that the combination of a Design Planner, Resource Pack and Design Icons did help guide them in the process of creating EBBL designs. It was suggested that the physical layout of the planner made engaging with the complexity of creating an EBBL design more manageable. Being able to layout the proposed EBBL approach from 'the top level right down to the specifics' helped 'fill in gaps' as the teams went through the processes of thinking about the content and management of the individual teaching sessions they wanted to develop. Working in groups, the DiBL
resources appeared to encourage discussion and debate as the teams physically engaged with the planner and icons. The questions on the planner appeared useful in encouraging participants to clarify the topics they wanted to teach whilst simultaneously allowing them to reflect on the appropriateness of the teaching methods they wanted to employ. Most participants appreciated the non-linear design of the planner because it provided them with the freedom to develop different sections simultaneously whilst retaining an idea of an overall approach. Some felt it should have been more linear suggesting a more sequential approach might have made the EBBL design process a little easier for them to comprehend and manage. However, the overall view was that the non-linear approach was useful because it provided educators with the freedom to develop a number of concurrent technical and pedagogic processes that a linear approach may have prevented.

A major factor that helped guide participants' use of the planner was the A4 Resource Pack fact sheets. Participants seemed keen to emphasise that whilst the planner provided a useful map to tie the different elements of an EBBL design together, without access to the fact sheets, the planner on its own would have been difficult to use without a working knowledge of the CoE framework. Being able to relate the questions to the various fact sheets in the Resource Pack provided context to the nature of the overall design process. For example, the focus on student-led learning contained within sections A and C of the Resource Pack appeared to help participants contextualise the overall pedagogic approach. Also, the gentle introduction to topics and practical examples provided around issues such as Orienting Students to Blended Learning, Setting Expectations in Blended Learning, Supporting Wiki Collaboration etc., appeared to help participants gain a better understanding of the various techniques they could employ in their own teaching and learning designs. Whilst this resource was highly rated, some participants felt it could have been improved through the inclusion of subjects such as creating learning aims and objectives and providing more detail in fact sheets such as 'What is Evaluation?' . Like the planner, participants reported that the fact sheets prompted them to reflect on their own teaching practices, particularly in relation to student and teacher-led approaches.

The Learning Design Icons appear to have been generally used once the content of the EBBL design had been agreed. Participants appreciated being able to visually create a learning sequence using the small icons. The variety of methods offered by the icons encouraged participants to become familiar with new approaches and 'think outside of the box'. They appreciated the text on the back, especially those who were unfamiliar with some of the methods available. The major attributes of this resource were felt to be the options it provided to create blended learning sequences in great detail, along with the ability to physically change the order of the design based on dialogue and discussion with other group members. Participants reported that by far the most useful group of icons were the Communication Group Roles. When combined with the Student Roles in EBL Groups fact sheet, these resources helped participants understand how they could facilitate and manage asynchronous online discussions without the fear of becoming overwhelmed. Participants reported that the ability to move the icons around made the task of conceptualising how they could create time and space flexible learning opportunities much easier to organise and manage.
Participants appear not to have engaged with the software until the EBBL design and content had been agreed. There seemed to be a distinct split between participants' views on the software selected for the event. Participants who felt confident in their technical abilities were able to quickly undertake the task of creating their digital triggering events and gain insight into how the communication tools could be used effectively. However, those who lacked technical confidence appear in the first instance to have taken a back seat and allowed their more proficient colleagues to engage in the development of their software task. The pressure of time was stated as the main reason for this pragmatic approach. Feedback from the participants who used the software stated that the EBBL design planning process provided a clear method and reason for adopting the applications they chose and helped to expedite the development process. The limited time frame was also blamed for not allowing participants to explore the full suite of software applications we had gathered for the event. Therefore this event did not provide an adequate opportunity to explore the impact the software could have had on the EBBL design development process for educators less confident in using technology.

Creating Interdisciplinary EBBL Opportunities

Participants working in interdisciplinary teams tended to find the first steps of the development process quite difficult. Finding a common area of learning to develop seemed to present major issues, the first and last segments of the planner were highlighted as being the most contentious. Where a topic was agreed, sometimes the wording of learning outcomes provided problems because of the different professional assessment requirements. However, through dialogue and discussion participants stated they engaged in problem solving tasks and prompted by the questions on the planner looked to find common areas for interdisciplinary EBBL development. When a broad area of practice was agreed the processes of preparing students for blended learning, creating online spaces for collaborative learning etc., helped participants explore methods of bringing not only students, but also practitioners, and service users and carers into the learning process. Participants highlighted that the enquiry-based nature of the Design Planner, Resource Pack and Design Icons guided them away from approaches that would have led them to use technology to simply deliver content, instead it gave them the tools to create designs that were time and place flexible, and encouraged the development of interactive and collaborative learning opportunities. Exploring the issues that could aid future interdisciplinary development, most participants felt that the DiBL resources provided a common framework and terminology around which EBBL designs could be developed regardless of the discipline they came from. As an example, one group stated that if someone in an interdisciplinary group of educators familiar with the DiBL tools suggested creating a triggering event, they would all possess a basic understanding of the concept and the steps required to develop and support the learning resulting from it.
A major barrier that many felt could prevent a change in practice was the time and planning commitment required to undertake this type of teaching and learning activity. Whilst the potential benefits for the students of developing their interdisciplinary group work, collaboration, enquiry, critical thinking, technical skills etc. were acknowledged, concern about the potentially negative impact on career progression of spending too much time on teaching and learning versus research activities was raised as a major stumbling block for adopting a change in practice by some participants. Also a small number felt they needed more opportunities to develop their technical skills in both multimedia development and online collaboration tools before they could think about creating EBBL designs on their own. Notwithstanding the issues already raised, most participants felt their experiences of the two-day event would not lead to an immediate wholesale change in practice. However, many participants felt that the DiBL experience did provide them with the tools, knowledge and contacts required to engage in small-scale developments of interdisciplinary EBBL opportunities that would have been difficult without access to these resources.

Summary

Larsen et al. (2008) have highlighted how higher education exists within a changing globalised social context in which the cost efficient availability of ICT has led to examples of innovative time and place independent pedagogic approaches. This paper has illustrated how these changes have enabled students in social care and health to engage in flexible, interactive and collaborative interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities. It is argued that educators in social care and health must be given opportunities to develop their technical and pedagogic knowledge and skills to understand and exploit the potential offered by ICT to bring dispersed groups of interdisciplinary learners together. Focusing on the work of CEIMH this paper has provided the ethos and rationale for the development of the DiBL resources in promoting this goal. Based on a two-day interdisciplinary training event, an evaluation of participants’ views suggests that the combination of a Blended Learning Design Planner, Resource Pack and Design Icons appeared to be successful in guiding educators through the complex processes of creating interdisciplinary EBBL designs. The DiBL resources provided interdisciplinary teams with a central focus, encouraging them to explore issues of content, design and delivery. The enquiry-based nature of the resources appeared to be successful in encouraging the development of digital artefacts designed to promote and support discussion and dialogue amongst interdisciplinary groups of learners. Although the tools appeared to promote confidence in developing interdisciplinary EBBL designs, the time commitment required to create these types of student-led approaches was cited as a potential barrier to their further development, particularly in research-intensive universities. Most participants felt that access to the DiBL resources would not result in an immediate wholesale change in practice, however it was felt they provided the necessary guidance, knowledge and stimulus for...
educators to start engaging in small-scale interdisciplinary EBBL collaboration.

Feedback also suggests that this change in practice would not have been possible without access and exposure to these resources.

Acknowledgements

DiBL would not have been possible without the assistance of my two Design Team colleagues, Danielle Hinton and Peter Rainger. Thanks are also due to the event coaches, my colleagues from the CEIMH Multimedia Team, Dee Partridge and Pam Newby. I would also like to thank Professor Ann Davis for her mentoring support.

References


Abstract

This paper examines final-year MA and BA social work students’ experiences of using Facebook as part of an enquiry-based blended learning design. A Think Family and Whole Systems module was redesigned using constructivist principles of emergent learning. This redesign enabled students to engage in life-like situations to help them reflect on the implications of using social networking sites as social work practitioners. It is suggested that student confidence in being able to outline the ethical issues, personal privacy concerns for professionals and service users, and the potential positive and negative aspects of using social networking sites for future professional development increased as a result of engaging with the learning design. To cater for the increasing use of social networks in society, a rationale for the learning design is outlined from the perspective of social work education. The paper then outlines the lessons learnt from students’ engagement with Facebook as a site for learning.

Keywords: Facebook, enquiry-based blended learning, social networking, blended learning, e-learning

Accepted: November 2012
Introduction

The main goal of social work education is to prepare students for the challenges of social work practice (O'Connor et al., 2009). This idea of preparedness should include opportunities to explore how social networking sites (SNS) are increasingly being used in society to access information and enhance social relationships (ONS, 2011; Tsang, 2011). To prepare for twenty-first-century social work, students must access learning opportunities to critically assess their SNS use, so they can ensure their online behaviour does not breach confidentiality, bring the profession into disrepute or transgress personal/professional boundaries (BASW, 2002; NASW, 1999). Appropriate preparation should also allow students to thoughtfully build on positive examples of social networking in areas such as youth engagement and enabling cheap and flexible means of communication between service users and providers (Dale, 2011).

Dorlee (2011) describes her experiences of qualifying from a social work programme, where the official policy of the school seemed to be one of anti-SNS use. This stance meant students were encouraged to refrain from all social networking, resulting in no opportunities to explore safe and ethical ways to engage in what, for many students, are becoming everyday methods of communication (Ahmedani et al., 2011). Although social work educators have historically appeared to be cautious about adopting ICTs in their teaching practices (Waldman and Rafferty, 2008), creative learning designs can provide students with opportunities to critically reflect on their everyday use of electronically mediated communications.

This paper explores how an enquiry-based blended learning (EBBL) design and Facebook were used to replace traditional methods of teaching in a Think Family and Whole Systems (TFWS) module. The redesign aim was to provide students with opportunities to critically reflect on their everyday SNS use, whilst retaining the original learning objectives of the module.

Facebook was an ideal site for learning because it was a space the majority of students indicated they already occupied. In a pre-teaching poll, 90 per cent (n = 40) of MA and 96 per cent (n = 57) of BA final-year students at Birmingham University, UK, reported having an active Facebook account. Of these, a high percentage indicated they used Facebook regularly to communicate with peers (91 per cent, n = 36, MA; 91 per cent, n = 52, BA). Another reason for using this site is based on Brown's (2009) argument that the everyday use of technologies such as Facebook can render the implications of online behaviours invisible. It was imperative students could surface and reflect on their ‘everyday’ online behaviours, particularly when they indicated they were likely to maintain their Facebook-based social networks once they left university (86 per cent, n = 34, MA; 89 per cent, n = 51, BA) and would consider using Facebook to discuss...
professional issues amongst peers in the future (79 per cent, n = 32, MA; 89 per cent, n = 51, BA). Therefore, using Facebook, the redesign of the module sought to provide students with opportunities to consider two additional issues:

(1) the potential implications of information publically accessible about them (via a SNS) by members of the public;

(2) whether SNS are an appropriate medium to engage in social work activity.

The evaluation in this paper focuses purely on students' perceptions of their learning around SNS use in social work. Feedback suggests that the EBBL design increased student confidence in the following three areas: first, in articulating issues of personal privacy, social workers need to be mindful when using Facebook; second, outlining the ethical issues of using Facebook for social work practice; third, explaining the potential positive and negative aspects of using existing social networks to develop post-qualifying professional practice. Feedback suggests that using Facebook made the learning experiences personally meaningful (Mayes and De Freitas, 2006) for the majority of students. However, although benefits were identified in using Facebook as part of this EBBL design, there were also some drawbacks. This paper seeks to outline some of the lessons learnt from these experiences.

Setting the context

Like most SNS, Facebook has three common elements. It allows individuals to 'construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Facebook provides an easy way to connect with people. Houghton and Joinson (2010) point to studies demonstrating that major motivating factors for Facebook use are the opportunity to link up and communicate with people one has met face to face, investigate new others and remain in contact with old friends. Facebook use amongst the MA and BA cohorts reported above suggests a consistency with latest trends in the UK. For example, in 2011, according to the Office for National Statistics, 77 per cent (nineteen million) of UK households had access to the internet, up from 73 per cent in 2010. Compared to 2010, a rise of six million people (45 per cent of internet users) had used a mobile phone to connect to the internet. Social networking on websites such as Facebook was identified as the most popular pastime, accounting for 91 per cent of internet users. This activity is not limited to the younger age group; almost one-fifth (18 per cent) of internet users aged sixty-five and over also indicated using SNS (ONS, 2011). At the
time of writing, Facebook is arguably the most popular social networking website, with more than 800 million active users, with 50 per cent of these logging in daily. There are currently more than seventy languages available, with 75 per cent of Facebook users coming from outside of the USA (Facebook, 2011).

Unlike pre-Facebook years, a social network created at university has the potential to easily persist once students have left. In previous years, if former students wished to remain in touch, they would have to write, phone and/or physically meet up. In the majority of cases, the exchanges and discussions taking place would remain private to the individuals/groups concerned. In the world of SNS, the way ex-students can maintain and relate to each other has changed dramatically in terms of ease and speed; this is because distance becomes less of an issue (Castells, 2009).

Issues of privacy and confidentiality are also altered. Depending on privacy settings, discussions, comments and exchanges of information can become a permanent record, potentially accessible to a whole network of friends, and friends of friends (Houghton and Joinson, 2010).

There are examples supporting Rafferty’s (2011) argument that qualifying programmes should seek to prepare students for this new social reality. Rafferty provides an example of a student on placement at a leaving care project, where the agency adopted a practice of looking up care-leavers’ Facebook pages to check on their well-being. Neither the agency nor the students asked the service users’ permissions to access their information, nor considered the ethics of their actions in relation to respecting service users’ rights to privacy. Reamer (2009) describes a situation in which a service user accessed private and personal details about a social worker through a mutual SNS friend, resulting in the professional feeling overexposed and unable to continue their working relationship. The limits of privacy and confidentiality present new challenges in a world in which information is easily available. As a consequence, Young (2009) argues that social workers should be taught to be mindful of the digital information available about them and the message(s) conveyed by their SNS profiles. If colleagues or service users have access to the same SNS, the content should not negatively affect the image of the social worker or their ability to work with service users. The limit of what is personal and public ‘space’ in a SNS needs to be clearly understood. The consequences of not being aware are highlighted by an example of social work colleagues posting ‘mean-spirited’ and derogatory comments about fellow workers, whilst being unaware that some network participants had not set their privacy settings properly. This incident meant postings were visible to members of the public and were available to be copied and circulated (Reamer, 2009). These comments resulted in tensions within the agency and violated social work codes of ethics in relation to behaviour likely to damage the image of social work and bring the profession into disrepute (BASW, 2002; NASW, 1999). The issue of boundaries in SNS also extends to relationships. Ayers (2011) provides an example of a
social worker being banned from practising after a conduct hearing found she had breached several professional boundaries. One of these included befriending the parent of a service user on Facebook. These examples are important in highlighting to students issues they need to consider if they receive friend requests from service users, particularly in relation to ensuring they maintain professional boundaries that minimise the risk of exploitation, harm and conflict with current and former service users. Fursland (2010) highlights how SNS have also been used by both adoptees and birth relatives to make contact, circumventing adoption agency processes. Oakwater (2012) illustrates some of the problems that can arise when contact is made without the support of adoption agencies and presents a powerful argument for professionals to be trained in the use of SNS. Ledesma and Casavant (2011) also demonstrate how using Facebook, social workers have managed to recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents. Dale (2011) argues that clear policies can help organisations overturn restrictive bans on workers' use of SNS, to enable greater engagement with service users to improve the planning and delivery of services. One of the aims of the learning design was to provide students with opportunities to make informed choices about how SNS can be used appropriately in their future practice.

Module background and redesign

The common use of Facebook and the ease with which students could stay in touch created an imperative to develop opportunities for them to consider the personal and professional implications of engaging in virtual communities. Without losing sight of the overall learning objectives, the TFWS module was redesigned to integrate Facebook use. This module is taught to both final-year MA (n = 44) and BA (n = 59) students concurrently over a period of three weeks between their first and second practice placements. The module aims to help students explore the contributions different professions can make to working with families and their networks. Students are encouraged to locate presenting issues within a wider context of families and communities and examine how difficulties faced by service users may interrelate with wider issues of social exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment.

Prior to redesign, no location existed within a congested curriculum to exclusively explore the implications of SNS on professional practice. A creative rethink of existing teaching methods offered a viable opportunity to integrate this additional learning. The redesign changed the module teaching approach from one based primarily on didactic lectures to one that integrated EBBL (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008) and closed Facebook groups. The following four critically important principles were used to guide the redesign process.
Learning design principles

Active student engagement

EBBL is based on a constructivist theoretical paradigm that recognises that each student brings their own experiences into a learning encounter, making learning emergent rather than given or discoverable (Vygotsky and Cole, 1978). This principle steered the learning design towards development of learning opportunities that required active student engagement.

Social learning

In an EBBL design, learning occurs mainly in a community of enquiry. Learning stems from social interaction (Goodman et al., 2003) where students and tutors have opportunities to exchange and explore perspectives, information resources and have space to connect ideas through reflection (Brown and McCartney, 1998). The design had to create spaces for students to apply new ideas and defend solutions, enabling them to move from novice to expert in a field of practice through experience (Moriarty et al., 2011).

Authentic learning

Learning in an EBBL environment should place students in real-world-type situations (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). To make learning personally meaningful, the design was based on a case study trigger created to allow opportunities for students to undertake research and develop and apply the knowledge and skills they will require in practice.

Legitimate use of technology

The learning design had to ensure students did not perceive the use of Facebook as a 'bolt on', but rather as an important and justified part of the learning process likely to enhance their future practice (Cooner, 2010).

Learning design process

Prior to teaching, the following resources and processes were developed. Based on previous academic scores, cohort-based mixed-ability groups of six or seven students were created to play the role of fictional interdisciplinary teams. A complex family case study was created to act as a

1068 Tarsem Singh Cooner at University of Birmingham on September 3, 2014 http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/ Downloaded from
learning trigger (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008). Four online lectures were developed with guided reading to expose students to the underpinning knowledge required to engage with the case study. At the end of each online lecture, students had to pass an online quiz and apply their learning to the case study in their closed Facebook groups. Six MA and eight BA closed Facebook groups were created for each team. These allowed the tutor to guide and students to share learning with peers. A hardcopy workbook provided a roadmap and milestones as well as enabling students to record their learning.

On the morning of the first teaching day, students attended a half-day face-to-face lecture. They were introduced to the module, case study, learning design and resources. They were asked to join their teams, with the tutor ensuring that non-Facebook users (MA, \( n = 4 \); BA, \( n = 2 \)) were not overrepresented in any single group.

Time was spent exploring the case study to ensure students ‘bought into’ the scenario and their roles. The context was set with a fictional letter from an advocacy agency highlighting cross-agency failures leading to the family at the centre of the case study reaching crisis point. Students were informed the Directors of Social Services had created their inter-disciplinary teams following receipt of the letter and their role was to carry out research and advise the Management Group on two specific issues. The first required them to engage in the EBBL process and present an ideal inter-disciplinary plan for working with the family. Using module learning and placement experiences, students had to identify potential barriers and present solutions. The teams were expected to work together and produce a fifteen-minute presentation and short report for the final day of teaching. As part of the case study story, students were told the Directors had recently become aware that the NHS were exploring the use of SNS to encourage service user participation and potentially inter-disciplinary staff development to ensure effective multi-agency working (NHS, 2009). The second issue therefore required the teams to use closed Facebook groups to discuss their research and develop their presentations whilst keeping the details of the case study family confidential. For the presentation, the teams were expected to advise the Management Group on whether SNS were appropriate ‘places’ for staff development activity and whether it was possible to develop inter-disciplinary professional practice whilst maintaining the confidentiality of service users. To inform their presentations, students had to use Facebook Group Docs (a wiki-type facility) to collectively develop and complete a 500–1,000-word short report reflecting on their on-going experiences.

Students were informed that, during the presentations, their non-presenting peers would take on the Management Group role. They would use electronic voting and an assessment rubric (based on module learning objectives) to provide formative peer assessment. Time at the end of each presentation would be allocated for questions and answers.
the first lecture and final cohort-based presentations, students were not required to attend any further face-to-face sessions (other than an optional presentation consultation meeting). All interaction between tutor and students was to be carried out using Facebook. Students were free to request face-to-face meetings with the tutor; no requests were made during the teaching.

Using and creating closed Facebook groups
Prior to using Facebook, issues around online privacy and professional boundaries in SNS were explored in the initial lecture. Exercises encouraged students (in their groups) to reflect on the type of information publicly available about them. Students considered a number of key boundary questions, such as: Would it be possible for case study members to find you on Facebook? What would you do if you received a friend request from one of the case study service users? What type of image does your Facebook profile convey about you to the case study family? The purpose of these exercises was to encourage students to reflect on the personal and professional implications of their Facebook privacy settings.

Having set the case-study context for using Facebook, the next step required the informed consent of students to engage in this medium. It was important that students did not feel compelled to take part or worried about a potential invasion of privacy. The concept of closed Facebook groups was introduced using material from Facebook for Educators (see URL: Facebook for Educators, available online at https://en-gb.facebook.com/FBforEducators/). It was clearly articulated that membership of the closed groups was time-limited to the module duration. Facebook friends of students would not be able to see the groups or its contents. Interactions in the closed groups would only be visible to the students and tutor (regardless of individual privacy settings). Also, critically, students did not have to ‘friend’ peers or the tutor to participate. Using closed groups meant interaction could take place without participants having to allow access to their private social networks. Students were encouraged to stay behind and ask further questions if they still felt unsure about any of the issues raised.

The closed groups for each learning team were created prior to the first teaching session. To join their closed groups securely, the tutor sent an e-mail to students containing a weblink. This link enabled students to request membership of their closed Facebook groups. The tutor was responsible (as administrator) for securely admitting each member. Students without Facebook accounts were asked to create one for the duration of the module to ensure they could take part in the learning process. After the module, these students were free to delete their accounts.

To encourage team working and mentoring skills, Facebook users within groups were asked to help non-users become familiar with the interface.
functions and privacy settings. If students had refused to create Facebook accounts, the backup plan (depending on numbers) was to employ a vicarious learning strategy within the learning teams (Mayes et al., 2001).

Evaluation

The evaluation included descriptive statistical content and qualitative analysis influenced by the works of Oliver and Conole (1998). They highlight evaluations have often been focused on results rather than an exploration of learning experiences. They argue that this has been the case particularly where skills and knowledge development have been difficult to measure quantitatively. Hughes (2003) argues studies that focus only on attitudinal surveys of students tend to gain inadequate understanding of the complex nature of the learning experience itself. A major obstacle in understanding these types of learning experiences has been the failure to measure the impact that technology can have on the process of education. Oliver and Harvey (2002) highlight that there is also insufficient clarity of what this 'impact' means and where it may be found. In order to investigate the impact of the redesign, the two issues in the evaluation this paper seeks to address are did student confidence in surfacing and addressing boundary issues for social workers in a networked society increase after completing a module that used Facebook as a site for learning and what themes emerged from their learning experiences that may impact on their future SNS use?

The evaluation was carried out in two stages, with the design informed by previous studies in evaluation literature (Cohen et al., 2000).

Self-efficacy data collection and analysis

Data were collected using a twenty-two-item self-efficacy scale on the first and final days of teaching. A six-point Likert scale was used ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. A code was employed to enable matching of pre- and post-teaching data sets and ensure student anonymity. Although there were forty-four MA and fifty-nine BA students, the pre- and post-teaching analysis resulted in a lower number of completed questionnaires, as students had to be present at both data collection points in order for their completed scales to be analysed. The data were analysed by cohort (MA, 35, BA, 48) and as a combined group (83); t-tests were used to compare means at each point. Data were analysed using SPSS 19 and measures of central tendency for each question within a subscale were calculated to signify changes in self-efficacy. Three subscales were developed to create overarching themes based on the learning objectives of the module. These covered ratings in relation to understanding and working within TFWS approaches, engaging with the EBBL model.
and maintaining boundaries on SNS. For the purposes of this paper, only data and analysis from the four subscale questions based on the latter theme will be explored (Table1).

Focus groups

Even though the above methods provided a wealth of information, quantitative data, by its nature, are quite limited in helping us to understand why students chose to respond in the way they did (Cohen et al., 2000). To gain meaningful conclusions and outline lessons learnt from this module, focus groups were arranged to examine students' views and learning experiences in more detail. The final evaluation stage took place six weeks after the module. The author collected qualitative data from two focus groups (MA and BA) with twelve randomly selected students (eleven female, one male). Students were assured that participation or otherwise would not impact on their grades. Participants were aged between nineteen and thirty-one years, with varying levels of past social work and educational experiences. An open-ended semi-structured interview schedule was designed to explore students' learning experiences of using Facebook and focused on three key elements of the learning design: Facebook: as a site for learning, using Facebook: issues of privacy and confidentiality, and short report: reflections on future professional use of SNS. In the focus groups, students had the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own terms and suggest future module improvements. Responses were recorded and transcribed. Discussions were analysed using QSR NVivo 9 software to conduct thematic comparisons and identify key themes in the data. To ensure accuracy, emergent themes were sent to focus group participants for comment and feedback.

From the results (Table1), we can conclude that, following exposure to the Facebook element of the EBBL design, students reported higher levels of confidence in outlining the potential positive and negative aspects of developing professional practice using SNS MA ($t_{(34)} = -7.04, p < 0.05, r = 0.77$), BA ($t_{(47)} = -6.59, p < 0.05, r = 0.69$). Students from both cohorts also reported higher levels of confidence in being able to outline some of the ethical issues of using Facebook to engage with service users MA ($t_{(34)} = -6.65, p < 0.05, r = 0.75$), BA ($t_{(47)} = -5.94, p < 0.05, r = 0.65$). On average, students also reported higher levels of confidence in outlining issues of personal privacy that social workers need to be mindful of when using SNS following teaching on this module MA ($t_{(34)} = -6.30, p < 0.05, r = 0.73$), BA ($t_{(47)} = -5.07, p < 0.05, r = 0.59$). Although the final question did not produce a statistically significant result, the overall mean scores for the subscale increased ($M = 4.78, SE = 0.102$ to $M = 5.50, SE = 0.104$, $t_{(7)} = -3.89, p < 0.05, r = 0.83$), suggesting an overall rise in confidence post teaching.
### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Cohort MA (N=35)</th>
<th>Pre-teaching Mean (SE)</th>
<th>Post-teaching Mean (SE)</th>
<th>t-test (df)</th>
<th>Sig. (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Effect size* (r)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>outline some of the potential positive and negative aspects of developing professional practice using social networking sites?</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>4.46 (0.171)</td>
<td>5.63 (0.083)</td>
<td>–7.04 (34)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outline some of the ethical issues of using Facebook to engage with service users?</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>4.74 (0.155)</td>
<td>5.69 (0.090)</td>
<td>–6.65 (34)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outline issues of personal privacy social workers need to be mindful of when using social networking sites?</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>4.77 (0.164)</td>
<td>5.77 (0.072)</td>
<td>–6.30 (34)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work in a closed Facebook group to create a presentation whilst maintaining the confidentiality of service users?</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>5.29 (0.186)</td>
<td>4.86 (0.266)</td>
<td>1.44 (34)</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>NS 0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscale totals MA and BA</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.78 (0.102)</td>
<td>5.50 (0.104)</td>
<td>–3.89 (7)</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Where the t-test result is statistically significant, a score of 0.5 or above for the effect size (r) suggests that, in practical terms, the learning design effect is substantive (Fields, 2009).
Focus groups findings

Facebook: site for learning

I feel it has been a useful exercise in terms of generating thought and discussion about what could happen in actual practice (MA student).

This student's response illustrates a repeated theme suggesting that engagement with Facebook triggered critical thought and discussion based on experiences of being placed in a life-like situation. This allowed students to experiment with settings and techniques on Facebook to explore how they could share information and maintain the confidentiality of the family in a safe environment. Writing to each other using the private messaging, chat facility and group wall allowed them to assess the viability of each in trying to meet the objectives of the tasks. When things went wrong, they felt they were able to use Facebook Group Docs to record, reflect and discuss these experiences collectively to analyse the broader potential consequences for professionals and service users.

I found it difficult to take my socialising head off and put my social work head on (BA student).

Students reflected on the negative feelings of intrusion they experienced. They reported notifications for deadlines, discussions about tasks, etc. meant there was no longer a separation between private (fun) and professional (work) time and space. A common theme raised was the conscious effort of having to change writing styles from informal, chatty, light-hearted to a more serious and professional style. Students on the whole felt work activities provided an unwanted intrusion. They overwhelmingly stated this experience would potentially discourage them from using Facebook for future work-related activity.

Using Facebook: issues of privacy and confidentiality

At work you make decisions about what you reveal all the time, this is no different, you've just got to be prepared to handle anything that comes from it (BA student).

No focus group members reported having a completely open Facebook profile at the start of teaching. Most students reported being happy with their privacy settings at the time. A few stated the first day's exercises made them reassess what information was publically accessible on their profiles. Discussions about the concept of privacy and its implications for social workers using SNS produced two broad themes. One centred on students actively concealing their existence on Facebook. These students, to varying degrees, ensured they could not be searched for on Facebook and/or used a username not easily traceable to them. They used Facebook...
to keep in touch with a select group of people of their choosing. The second theme centred on students believing that varying degrees of information such as religious and political views, activities and interests, list of friends, current location and access to some photo albums on their otherwise closed profiles was acceptable. The first group did not want to be visible to service users or work colleagues, to avoid the potential consequences of having to reject/ignore friend requests. There was a strong sense of wanting to maintain separate private and professional personas. The second group to varying degrees wanted to enjoy the benefits of Facebook. In this group, there were differing opinions about the amount of information they should reveal. Privacy in this context was a fluid term. Being aware that their profile could be found made them take informed decisions about the amount of personal information they wanted to reveal. A major point emphasised was one of choice and being in control. Some students explained they had already rejected friend requests from other students and service users (they worked with on placement) by explaining they wanted to keep a separation between their private and professional lives. They felt friend requests should be dealt with professionally, the same as any other situation concerning boundary issues.

Two major points that students felt they took from this learning experience centred on their practice of accepting friends and reviewing privacy settings on Facebook posts. Following the initial exercises, students felt they became more mindful of whom they accepted as friends, becoming aware that members of friends networks may be able to access their posts. To address this issue, students reported changing the way they posted some materials on Facebook by limiting access to friends, rather than friends of friends or public. This way they felt they exercised a greater degree of control over the audience accessing their posts.

I'd never really thought about it before, now I won’t even mention any work-related stuff using things like my Google email account (BA student). As a result of this learning experience, there appeared to be a deeper curiosity about the bounds of privacy and confidentiality on SNS, particularly in relation to ownership of information. The focus groups reported a raised sense of awareness about the fact that SNS like Facebook own the data published on their sites. Also, the fact that Facebook employees could potentially access their data helped students explore a number of moral and ethical issues about using SNS for future professional activities. A number reported that, as part of their research, they looked up the terms and conditions of the free web-based services they used. The normal practice reported was one of signing up for free services without reading or considering the consequences of the terms and conditions. In regards to confidentiality, we found it quite hard to maintain (MA student).
Students felt that having to create the presentation forced them to creatively produce solutions for maintaining the confidentiality of the case study family. Students reported most teams had face-to-face meetings to work out a system of codes to identify family members and networks online. This process raised concerns about dehumanising the service users. Also, as the learning proceeded, the ability to maintain confidentiality of the family was undone by occasional lapses by team members accidentally mentioning names. Concerns were also raised that the unique circumstances of a family’s story could be recognised by someone gaining unauthorised access to a Facebook account. Students provided a number of scenarios based on experiences; these included lost or stolen laptops and mobile phones with saved Facebook access, unattended phones/computers still logged into Facebook accounts, insecure security settings, hacking, accidental posting of material onto another friend’s wall or someone reading a text message update.

Short report: reflections on future professional use of SNS

Even with the use of pseudonyms, closed groups, whatever, if I was a service user, I wouldn’t appreciate my personal information being shared on these sites (MA student).

Engaging with the exercises caused the rights of service users to surface. Students emphasised that this issue had been raised in their earlier discussions. However, as the exercises progressed, the ethical issues particularly in relation to ownership of information, the ease with which information could be copied and shared without consent, data protection issues and service users’ rights to confidentiality began to be examined in greater detail.

Even in instances in which students fictitiously created informed consent, all students came to the conclusion that the codes of practice and legislation would prevent them from using SNS in future for exchanging and discussing agency and service user information.

There are probably ways that we can use things like Facebook, but it would need careful thought and planning (MA student).

Students appreciated the flexibility Facebook offered in terms of immediacy of communication and ability to share multimedia content. This was proposed as a powerful argument for the future professional use of SNS. Having undertaken the exercises, all students felt it would be inappropriate to attempt to use SNS to share agency or service user information without the explicit consent of both. Some students felt service users should have a right to pick Facebook as a medium for communication, if they felt comfortable using it. In these cases, it was proposed that both parties should create separate accounts and engage only after approval from all involved.
If you use something pretty much everyday you become really confident... until you try something that isn't as easy as you first thought, that really gets you thinking (BA student).

Students felt there was a false level of overconfidence at the beginning of the teaching process. It was only by engaging in the exercises that they began to realise the practical, ethical and legal complexities of the issues involved. Students felt as the tasks progressed, they began to learn about things they had not initially considered. Initial overconfidence seemed to be narrowly linked to their technical abilities and familiarity with Facebook. Many were already part of closed Facebook student networks, adding to their sense of confidence. Many students reflected that their original confidence scores were based on inexperience and did not take into account the complexities of the issues involved in using SNS professionally. Following engagement with the learning process, a raised awareness of the issues was reported to have made them reassess their original assumptions about how they could professionally make use of their existing social networks in future.

Summary

Social networking is becoming an integral part of many students' everyday experiences. This learning design illustrates how a range of activities using constructivist principles of emergent learning can be creatively combined to help students critically reflect on core practice issues such as how personal and professional boundaries in an increasingly networked society (Castells, 2009) can be respected. A major concern from the outset of the learning design was to ensure students could learn through experience by accessing activities that mirrored their real-life practices. Explaining the rationale for using Facebook in this context appeared to promote student 'buy-in' because they could understand the legitimacy of employing the medium as a site for learning. The evaluation suggests these experiences made them more confident in being able to surface and address online boundary issues for social workers. Based on processes of group discussion and critical reflection, students also seemed more confident in making informed choices about how SNS could be appropriately used in their future practice.

From a tutor perspective, there are a number of issues that need to be considered for anyone interested in implementing a similar design. In this instance, the tutor alone designed, created and taught the module. Possessing the technical, pedagogic and content knowledge allowed the tutor to adapt the tools and approaches to meet the emergent needs of students. If a team are responsible for different elements of the teaching design, this flexibility to respond to emergent student needs should not be hindered. Using Facebook as a site for learning offered a number of...
advantages and disadvantages. As tutor, being able to use a Facebook app (application) on a mobile phone to respond to student questions and queries allowed for a greater degree of participation to guide and monitor student learning. The disadvantage of this ‘always-on’ communication facility meant there was no time away from teaching and, after the first few days, students had raised expectations that the tutor would respond immediately to all communications. For future deliveries, the tutor will set virtual office hours and agree with students a minimum period within which to respond. During the first two days of the module, Facebook started to update its interface. This resulted in frustrations for some students whose posts did not appear for periods of up to four hours. This situation was resolved once the update was complete. Unlike university-based resources, using external sites like Facebook means that students and educators have little notice of changes likely to impact on the quality of learning. Providing good-quality and immediate feedback did create pressure for the lone tutor; to address this issue in future, a small team of practitioners and service users may be asked to assist online. This addition would support the principles of developing learning within a community of enquiry. Compared to previous years, the module evaluations recorded higher levels of learner satisfaction. An on-going evaluation is planned to assess the impact of this facet of the module’s learning on students’ use of SNS in their first year of assessed practice. Based on the experiences of this module, an argument for good practice suggests students should explore SNS boundary issues before entering their first assessed placements.

Ethics statement

I confirm the study conforms to internationally accepted and professional ethical guidelines. The participants in the study were informed at the outset that material generated would be used for research and publication purposes and anonymity would be maintained. Study participants had a right to withdraw at any stage of the study and request that their material contributions not be included in any final published works. All participants gave verbal consent for their work to be used in this study.

References


Accessing the CD instructions
When inserted the CD should auto-start, if it does not please follow the steps below:

Please note: The Macintosh version no longer works on the modern OSX operating system, only the Windows version now works.

1. Insert the CD.
2. On the computer desktop, click on the Windows "Start" button.
3. Then go to "My Computer" or "Computer".
4. Double click the "VSCT" icon.
5. Double click the small "VSCT" icon.
6. The CD will start and carry out some preliminary system checks. Once complete a “Press to enter” button will appear, click this to begin the programme.

Note: to view the video case studies QuickTime must be installed on your system.

Problems: If there is a problem with the system check page, press on the “shift” (keyboard) key to bypass this stage. The system check stage was created because when the CD was first published in 2001 sound and video capabilities did not ship as standard on most computers.
Background

The aim of the CD was to allow students to explore complex abstract concepts and relate them to practice. The impetus for creating the CD was based on my experiences of teaching students on placement who often struggled to comprehend the complex interplay between national and local policy and the impact this could have on service delivery. In planning and developing the CD I used a games-based approach incorporating a virtual town (see below). Learners engage in ten case studies where their decision-making has an impact on whether the Black residents experience equality of access to social care services. This approach encouraged learners to grasp how policy could impact on their practice and through the processes of enquiry allowed them to surface and discuss some quite complex theoretical issues with peers and educators. Students and educators were encouraged to work with others to explore and develop their learning through discussion and debate.
New knowledge and learning

This submission provides evidence of how my experiences of creating and researching the use of interactive multimedia video-based case studies helped influence the technical, social work and learning design elements of the scenario-planning paper Cooner (2004). These experiences allowed me to generate a vivid description of a plausible future (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003) in relation to EBBL in social work education. The CD also illustrates my first implementation of a:

• virtual town for students to explore
• 'quest' type approach to encourage learning, discussion and debate
• 'challenge' feature in the video case study to encourage thoughtful interaction

The use of a multimedia, story-driven, interactive, problem-based case study approach introduced and generated new learning, knowledge, ideas, discussion and debate in the social work community about how this format could be used in education (see for example Appendix 1). The lessons from using the CD taught me that computer-based learning could trigger student curiosity. This then encouraged students to define key questions for exploration and research. Another critical lesson from this period for my future EBBL work was the insight that when the CD was combined with discussions with other learners/educators, this tended to result in powerful learning experiences.
The learning design approach

Images 1 to 4 illustrate the ‘quest’ component. The learning is also set in a social work related environment.

Image 1

Image 2
Images 5 and 6 illustrate the start and finish points of the software. To enter the virtual town you must click on the figure below.

To move the figure around the town, use the up, down, left and right arrow keys on your keyboard (see image 7).
To begin each individual video case study, click on the red text and follow the instructions.
Images 9 to 17 illustrate how the video case studies work.
When you complete the case study, you are provided with feedback based on your responses. If you successfully complete the case study, you will be provided with a password to open one of the ten locks in image 5.

Reflection
The experiences of having the sole responsibility for the concept, design, research and production of this CD provided me with a unique insight. The paper Cooner (2004) therefore sought to use this knowledge and experience to encourage the profession to actively explore, consider and positively influence the impact that ICTs could have on social work education.
References


VIRTUAL PLACEMENT (VP) SUBMISSION

Please see overleaf for information about how to access the VP software. A brief context and screenshots are also provided to relate this artefact to the submission.

Contents

Page 2 - Virtual Placement on CD-ROM
Page 3 – Accessing the Virtual Placement instructions
Page 4 – Background
Page 5 – New knowledge and learning
Page 6 – The learning design approach
Page 12 – Reflection
Page 13 – References
Accessing the Virtual Placement instructions

Please follow the instructions below to access the VP on the attached CD-ROM. (Note: The VP can also be downloaded from the SwapBox Repository by using the following link: http://www.swapbox.ac.uk/50/)

1. Insert the CD.
2. On the computer desktop, click on the Windows "Start" button.
3. Then go to "My Computer" or "Computer".
4. Double click the "VirtualPlacement" CD icon (please note: the image on your computer may differ).
5. You can either copy the "VirtualPlacement" folder to your hard drive (recommended) or run the programme from the CD by undertaking step 6.

6. Double click the "VP" icon (located within the above folder) to start the programme.

Note: You will only be able to save the "WordPhotos" if you are running VP from your hard drive.

Background

The aim of the VP was to prepare students for "live" practice placements by allowing them to explore the following topics:

• self-knowledge
• knowing and learning
• becoming and being a professional
• communicating
• collaboration and conflict
• making decisions
evaluating and reflecting

The students were able to engage with these topics by exploring a metaphorical wood. The wood had been carefully designed using the authors' (Doel & Cooner, 2002a) experiences of preparing students for and engaging with them on practice placements. The VP aimed to re-create situations, dilemmas and responses that could occur in live placements. The VP sought to help the students (as explorers) consider the holistic nature of good practice, rehearse it and see "the wood for the trees", before going out onto their first "live" practice experience. The creation and rationale for the programme is further explored in an article contained in this submission (Doel & Cooner, 2002b).

New knowledge and learning

This submission provides evidence of how I used my technical knowledge to move the dissemination of the VP from a CD-ROM to online format. By offering a free, globally available learning artefact, produced at a university, connected to an online discussion forum where learners could engage with the educators, this software possessed many of the attributes now commonly associated with the current Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) movement.

This project enabled me to create a:

• metaphorical landscape for learning
free software programme available for download to a potentially global audience

learning design that included an online discussion forum

place for students to record and reflect on their learning (using a WordPhoto function)

Moving from a CD-ROM to web-based project also demonstrated to me that the principles and ethics of social work should drive the adoption of ICTs in social work education. Creating the software also showed fellow educators that some of the pedagogic concerns at the time, such as the increasing dominance of the competency approach (Kelly & Horder, 2001) could be tackled by using the power of multimedia. The experiences of engaging with learners and educators on the online discussion forums also had a profound impact on how I designed future software “triggers” for use in EBBL designs.

The learning design approach

The learner comes across a guide in each of the seven trees. This guide is known as a “Treebie” (Image 1) and helps the learner engage with each of the seven subject areas.
In creating the metaphor for the programme, we used a “quest” approach.
To complete the quest successfully, the learner’s aim is to collect 7 pieces of a flying machine. This machine will enable them to fly above the tree and see the whole wood.
During the quest, learners use “WordPhotos” to record their learning. We found these worked really well in encouraging reflection and discussion.
Learners are provided with challenging situations that they may face in practice. Rather than adopting an "information transmission" approach, the learning is achieved through engagement with the situations presented. (The next two images are from Tree 3 – becoming and being a professional.)
At various points, prompts are used to help learners explore issues in much more detail.
This was the first software I created that was available globally via the Internet and provided a facility for online engagement via a discussion forum. Whilst initially aimed at educators, students used the board to share and discuss their learning.

Reflection
Amongst the many lessons I learned during this project, perhaps the biggest was in working with Professor Mark Doel. This collaboration allowed a great deal of cross-fertilisation of ideas and added something extra to the development of VP that may not have been possible had I been working alone. This experience helped us learn how students may engage in an EBBL encounter. We both recognised that we were students collaboratively exploring new ways of teaching and learning. This student perspective has
remained with me and provided a valuable lens through which I have viewed the EBBL designs I have consequently created.

References


Accessing the app

To access the app, please download from either the iTunes or Google Play Stores by searching for "Social Work Social Media" or using the links below.

Unfortunately, this is the only method available to share the app.

To download for iPhone/iPad devices:

To download for Android devices:
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=air.uk.ac.bham.cooner

Introduction

This submission provides evidence of how I can work at the intersection of social work subject, creative learning design and technology development to create new learning artefacts. In creating the app I have relied on my extensive experiences of developing digital social work resources and EBBL designs. This short overview outlines how my unique combination of experiences and skills allows me to add new knowledge and learning by:

• imagining and generating artefacts others may initially have difficulty visualising
• illustrating how having to rely on the resources of an inter-disciplinary production team and cost have not acted as a barrier to development
Once surfaced, the introduction of this type of innovative learning resource can stimulate fellow educators, practitioners and students to build up on and improve the ideas, designs and processes outlined.

Background

The idea for creating an app was based on two major factors. The first was the observation that the majority of pre-qualifying students and practitioners on post-qualifying courses were arriving at university in possession of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. The second was the growing number of ethical and practice issues surfacing for social work due to the increased use of social media in society.

This sparked an idea that there should be an exploration of how social work could take learning about the ethics of social media use onto the actual platforms students and practitioners were using. The following section briefly illustrates the process I undertook to create new knowledge and learning about these fields.
The first part of the process was to undertake research into the social work social media topic area to draw out the major areas for learning. The second part of the research process involved an exploration of the types of interface design that could trigger discussion and debate so the app could be used as part of an EBBL design. The third area of research involved finding an appropriate integrated development environment to create an app for the iOS and Android multi-screen touch mobile platforms.

Integrated development environment (IDE)
Research into mobile touch devices illustrated that the two biggest platforms at the time of production were iOS and Android. To develop for both these platforms I decided to use Flash Professional CS6. Using this IDE allowed me to develop once and simultaneously deploy to both platforms, thus ensuring the app was available to approximately 90% of mobile users. The image below illustrates the main IDE interface.
Adopting this IDE meant I had to learn a new software programming language called ActionScript3. Becoming proficient in this coding language allowed me to add logic to control navigation and story branching, audio and other user touch interactions. The image below provides a small example of coding that animates the different case studies on and off the screen and adds/removes them from the devices memory.

Creating the digital assets for the case studies

As well as writing the case studies and then producing an on-screen version, I also had to create the interface design and story-based images. These had to be developed so that they would work on multiple numbers of different mobile touch-screen displays.

Learning design principles

To ensure the app could be used to trigger discussion and debate a principles-based approach was employed (Clark, 2013). By adopting this
The design seeks to support EBBL by allowing the educators to ask students to engage with the app as homework and explore the issues raised through either online or class-based discussion and debate.

The app does not use a purely text-based "information transmission" approach but instead adopts an authentic scenario-based learning design to allow users the opportunities to explore the following questions:

§ Should social workers be mindful of their online image?
§ Is developing social media skills important for social workers?
§ What are the ethical implications of exploring open social media profiles?
§ Does social media present new personal/professional boundary issues?
How can social workers effectively engage in continuing professional development when using social media?

Can skills, knowledge and confidence in social media use lead to greater service user/community/inter-professional engagement?

The images on the following pages provide an example of the graphical and learning design approach. The app also employs a games-based method to motivate the learner to think carefully about their responses by challenging them to complete the app without having to restart from the beginning. A description of how the software works is attached to the following images with a reflection at the end of the document.

Images 1 to 3 set the context for the learner.
Images 4 to 7 illustrate one of the case studies. What is not possible to demonstrate here is the audio component (Image 7) where the managers offer their competing perspectives on the issues raised.
Based on the advice offered the learner is asked to make a decision (Image 8) depending on the option chosen the app will take a different branching approach.

Image 8 offers the learner feedback based on a successful outcome. The aim of this feedback is to illustrate potential outcomes related to practice as well as trigger further discussion and debate.
Upon successfully completing the case studies, additional opportunities to continue learning are offered via social media as well as topics for further research and discussion.
The app has been developed to trigger discussion that can be used as one part of an EBBL design. Having the ability to join the technical, educational and social work subject dots has enabled me to take the seed of an idea for learning in an emerging platform and subject area and take it through to production and publication. This short description of the process I undertook to develop the app illustrates how I offered new areas of knowledge and learning for social work education. My aim is to write about and share the processes briefly described above in more detail with the wider social work community. My belief is that these publications will be important because the mobile and social media platforms will become more prominent in pre and post qualifying social work education.
teaching approaches. I believe this combination has placed me in a position to make a unique and original contribution to the field of EBBL in social work education.

REFERENCES