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
University to provide safe learning environments that encourage a high degree of introspection, discussion and confidence to develop appropriate professional practices. 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:

- **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).
- **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).
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
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’.

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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 on 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.

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