Chapter 78
Internationalising Social Work Education Using Massive Open Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

Internationalising the curriculum is a priority of universities worldwide and increasingly a focus of social work education. Social workers espouse principles of global justice and community development yet social work in Australia remains locally focused. A review of international and local trends in the literature on ePedagogy and social work education within the context of internationalising the social work curriculum highlights current trends and practices in blended delivery and future opportunities provided by massive open online courses (MOOCs). Consideration of a case study of educational practices in the design and delivery of a community work course in blended delivery mode in Australia and India and via MOOC offering reveals that contemporary educational technologies can facilitate quality learning and teaching experiences. It is argued that increased flexibility in course offerings provides students with greater choice to engage in a range of quality educational experiences that are locally and globally contextualized. This chapter is well placed for the discussion on social networking and collaborative learning MOOCs – building MOOCs communities.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally the social work profession has been cautious in adopting online courseware as an alternate delivery mode to face-to-face on-campus delivery. This reluctance to include Web-mediated course delivery is primarily due to the people focused nature of social work and the importance of developing good interpersonal communication skills. However, in recent years there has been a worldwide upsurge

in the blended delivery of social work courses, which include traditional face-to-face classroom experience and online access modes. Because social work pedagogy is contextually defined, sophisticated information and communications technology (ICT) tools serve to enhance such situated learning environments through effective human-computer interaction (HCI). The chapter commences with a brief historical overview of the use of technologies in social work education. This is followed by consideration of blended delivery and the potential of MOOCs in social work education. This is within the context of internationalising the curriculum and the social work profession. We present a case study of learning and teaching in community work, a core course in social work professional qualifying programmes. We illustrate three different offerings of a community work course using a blended delivery mode in Melbourne Australia and also in Odisha India as well as a potential MOOC offering. Each mode of delivery of the course highlights issues of academic integrity in relation to cross cultural values, knowledge and skills in local and global contexts. This community work course is offered at an Australian university as core study in the Bachelor of Social Work (Honors) and the double degree Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology)/ Bachelor of Social Work (Honors). Community work is currently offered in blended mode delivery in Melbourne with plans currently underway for a blended mode delivery to be piloted in Odisha. We argue that there is also potential to develop a MOOC offering of this course and provide details of how this might be achieved.

BACKGROUND: TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

In Australia in the late seventies the "demarcation between on-campus and off-campus studies" in tertiary institutions became more 'blurred' (Foks & Hopper, 1979 p. 74). Distance education was the initial alternate delivery mode adopted by a small number of schools of social work (e.g. Monash University) in the 1980's. This was initially aimed at addressing the unmet demand for qualified workers in rural areas; potential students who were otherwise unable to access tertiary programmes. During this period Distance education generally comprised structured learning which took place when lecturers and students were separated with communication maintained on an individual basis through print and other media (e.g. radio, telephone, television, audio and video tapes). Distance education was gradually replaced by 'fleximode' delivery. A fleximode study programme comprised on and off campus study providing students with a set of course material together with regular teaching and peer contact (Greagg, 1986). An important element in fleximode pedagogies comprised pre-planned combinations of on and off campus studies of which an important element was to encourage geographically dispersed students to become independent learners. The degree of overlap in the concepts alternate to conventional on campus teaching and learning such as distance education, external study, combined on and off campus programmes and fleximode led to the adoption of the term 'flexible learning options' to indicate any combination of these approaches in facilitating an adult education approach to the flexible delivery of social work education (Hawkins & Sefton, 1989). This was targeted specifically at student/ workers in rural areas and/ or with restricted access to conventional tertiary programmes. Flexible or alternate modes of teaching and learning has increased potential due to the evolution of ICT tools that assisted with organizational and administrative aspects of course design and delivery. This includes developing communities of learning to foster quality interactions in the online environment (Flynn, Maiden, Smith, Wiley & Wood, 2014). The fleximode and flexible delivery methods of teaching and learning are now superseded by the blended mode of delivery.

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