Chapter 16

The Utility of Disruptive Technologies in Interprofessional Education:
Negotiating the Substance and Spaces of Blended Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will consider the educational benefits and challenges of introducing e-learning objects within an interprofessional curriculum. It examines the tensions of curriculum development as content or process-driven in the context of facilitating interactive learning using blended learning strategies which combine online and face-to-face interactions. This chapter draws upon an evaluation of student and staff experiences of an interprofessional curriculum incorporating health and social care users and carers as case scenarios in a web-based simulated community, Wessex Bay, and highlights congruent and disruptive factors in negotiating transformative learning and cultural change. It draws conclusions and recommendations for informing practice in interprofessional education and suggests directions for future research to inform the substance (interprofessional case scenarios) and spaces (discussion boards, chat rooms, classroom) for collaborative learning in an interprofessional curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Interprofessional education (IPE) in health and social work has been strongly advocated to encourage effective partnership working in order to improve services and effect change (Barr, 2002; Barr & Ross, 2006; Whittington, 2003). The potential of online technologies in overcoming the constraints of place-situated and time-bounded classrooms is key here.

The potential for creativity and transformative learning are highlighted by Bruner in suggesting that "Knowing is a process not a product" (1966, p. 72). Curriculum development literature distinguishes between "curriculum as content and education as transmission, curriculum as product and education as instrumental and curriculum as process and education as development" (Kelly 2004, p. 46). The challenge is to encourage participants, both staff and students, to make the transition from perceiving the interprofessional case scenarios as ready-made e-learning products to a process of engaging creatively in the spaces for collaborative learning whether through online e-processes or face-to-face.

The case study reported in this chapter highlights congruent and disruptive factors in negotiating transformative learning and cultural change. It draws on evaluation of student and staff experiences of an interprofessional curriculum incorporating health and social care users and carers as case scenarios in a web-based simulated community, Wessex Bay. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for informing practice in interprofessional education and suggested directions for future research to inform the substance of e-products and spaces of e-processes in blended learning will be outlined.

BACKGROUND

A new curriculum including interprofessional education (CAIPE, 1997) at each undergraduate level was introduced at Bournemouth University in 2005 for adult, child health, mental health and learning disability nursing disciplines, midwifery, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, operating department practice (ODP) and social work students. In common with many HEIs providing education in these subject areas, the challenge was to facilitate meaningful interprofessional learning whilst balancing a number of structural factors: the complexities of professional body requirements, the logistics of large student numbers and multi-site teaching across three sites in Dorset, Somerset, and Hampshire, and a wide range of practice placements.

The learning and teaching strategy adopted utilised a blended learning approach, providing a mix of online and face-to-face interactions (Sharpe et al., 2006) to provide interprofessional learning activities whilst supporting and engaging geographically dispersed student groups. The principal vehicles used to integrate IPE activities were an e-learning object known as 'Wessex Bay' and a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), a commercial system named 'Blackboard'. The aspiration was to provide the technology affordances for promoting and supporting a virtual community of practice (Wenger, 1998) to enable the dispersed communities of practitioners, students and tutors, to collaborate and develop interprofessional practice through face-to-face and online interaction (Scammell et al., 2008).

Building on previous projects (Hutchings, 2002; Hutchings et al., 2007; Quinney, 2005; Mulholland et al., 2005) and drawing on pedagogic literature on both e-learning (Beetham & Sharpe, 2007; Laurillard, 2002; Miers et al., 2007; Salmon 2000, 2002) and interprofessional education and partnership working (Barrett et al., 2003; Clarke et al., 2007; Quinney, 2006), a simulated web-based community, 'Wessex Bay', was created to facilitate interprofessional collaboration and learning across a range of health and social work disciplines in an interprofessional curriculum. Its use was linked to the VLE, offering facilities for

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