RESEARCHING ENQUIRY-BASED BLENDED LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

by

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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.

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CONTENTS

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)[1]. 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.

PUBLICATIONS

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 21st Century social workers.

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 *individual* within their *social context* the EBBL designs had two broad learning goals. The first was to provide students with:

> "… 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)

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.

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