

CONTRIBUTION TO SYMPOSIUM ON:

TITLE OF PAPER: e-tutoring students on professional practice placements

AUTHORS: Gill Cressey

INSTITUTION: University of Birmingham

SESSION TYPE: individual research paper

NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTACT PERSON:

Gill Cressey, School of Education, Westhill Campus, University of Birmingham, Weoley Park Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LL

TELEPHONE: (0121) 472 7245

EMAIL: g.r.cressey@bham.ac.uk

NUMBER OF WORDS: 3000

FIVE KEY WORDS: e-tutoring, change, communication, support, reflective learning

PROPOSAL:

Abstract

A project to create on-line support for students on professional development placements in Community, Play and Youth work contexts, has provided an ideal situation to carry out a piece of Action Research. The research tracks a number of key players through the process of the introduction of a Webct course called "on-line support for students on placement". This includes the unfolding experiences of the course designers, tutors, fieldwork supervisors, students and administrators as the course was formulated and introduced. The paper considers a number of very practical issues that have arisen and evaluates the ways in which, and the extent to which, the introduction of this Webct initiative is added value.

Collaboration between administrative, technical and academic staff is crucial for this initiative and the journey of each of these people in different roles is tracked through the story of the developing project. The joys and the stresses are forthrightly explored.

Students on fieldwork placements who are accustomed to group work at University frequently feel isolated at placements. They feel that University and workplace are different worlds and have difficulty integrating theory learned at University with realities faced at work. This project uses communication tools to conduct group work and tutorial support of individuals on-line. None of the academics involved had prior experience of being networked learning tutors. One of the designers has technical expertise of web design, one has a focus on learners and learning methods that she is newly applying to e-learning and the third is a member of administrative support staff, whose job is changing as a result of the project to include management of the Webct course. The student whose progress through the project is being evaluated vary in their level of computer literacy and include students who are very wary of any work involving use of computers at all, as well as students who are net surfing enthusiasts.

Another group of "players" are the youth workers, play workers and community workers who act as supervisors of the students in work places.

There have been deliberations over their inclusion in the project and there are remaining barriers to their participation that are explored in the paper.

As well as use of communication tools online materials have been made available as contents. These are about reflective practice and linking theory with practice. The paper describes the thinking behind the choice of contents material.