Nurse Education Today 35 (2015) e1–e5

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Nurse Education Today

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/nedt

Contemporary Issues

Perspectives on the application of technology to enhance learning in an undergraduate nursing degree programme

Introduction

This paper discusses concepts and practice relating to the use of computer-based technologies for enhancing learning. It draws on examples from a UK nursing degree programme.

Education is a tool for social change (Freire Institute, 2014) and the use of digital technologies has potential to democratise education by enhancing access to learning across the globe (Carver and Harrison, 2013). Mass communication can influence deeply embedded social patterns and support social change by helping to reduce educational inequities. For example, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCS) are freely available online educational resources. They are provided by commercial and non-commercial organisations, and increasingly by higher education institutes (HEIs). MOOCS are predicated on person-centred learning, in that it is the learner who makes decisions about structure and content. Thus it could be argued that, in addition to widening access to education, MOOCS further democratise learning by reducing the influence of teachers. However, there is a discourse around who really benefits from MOOCS, and whether they truly make mass learning possible. A view reported in the press is that a high proportion of people using free education are already sufficiently wealthy and well educated to access HEIs (Financial Times, 2014). This has implications for philanthropic providers of MOOCs, who may conclude that they are inadvertently strengthening existing educational inequalities.

MOOCs provide university-quality educational courses (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2013) available to anyone with access to the internet; meanwhile, universities have also embraced educational technologies. Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), simulated worlds, social media, videos, podcasts, lecture capture, and feedback mechanisms using smartphones are commonly used in UK HEIs (Centre for Learning Technology, 2014). Hence there is some blurring of functions between traditional and new providers of higher education.

Perspectives on Using Technology to Enhance Learning in Higher Education

These shifts have generated lively debate about the potential and pitfalls of e-learning in HEIs. The reduced teacher contact characteristic of online learning can unnerve or fail to engage students. Equally, face-to-face teaching is not best suited to all settings: in a large, non-interactive lecture, the physical presence of a teacher can have limited impact on the learning process. In our university nursing department, there can be over 400 nursing students in a cohort, and we rely heavily on technology. We often use 'blended learning', a term that denotes programmes of learning which combine face-to-face and online activities. Heinze et al. (2007) used Laurillard's conversational model (Laurillard, 1993) (Fig. 1) to develop a theoretical understanding of blended learning. The conversational model shows progression from knowledge exchange to deep understanding and incorporates iterative exchanges and periods of reflection for teacher and student. It has particular value for us, because it helps explain how to combine art (personal and intellectual skills development) with science (physical skills and factual information), both equally important in nursing.

Heinze and colleagues acknowledged a challenge of student engagement in e-learning, recognising that students may not complete online tasks, e.g. formative assessments, tutorial preparation or studying learning resources. They argued that online and face-to-face activities are not equivalent, and conceptualised online learning as complementary to face-to-face learning, not a replacement. Nicol (2007) described a series of case studies exploring the use of online multiple choice questionnaires (MCQs) in formative and summative assessment in higher education. Although the findings are specific to the study contexts, the paper illustrates how online MCQs can be an efficient and popular learning and assessment mechanism when integrated creatively into a course.

Some discourse around using technology to enhance education has been concerned with finding the most effective blend of online and face-to-face activities. Analysis of a survey of over 2000 Austrian university students identified that e-learning was preferred for more structured tasks, and face-to-face learning preferred where the aim was to reach a shared understanding (Paechter and Maier, 2010). This suggests the possibility of developing a formula for blended learning, tailored to the subject matter and learning outcomes. Goodfellow's (2013) critique of using technology in learning concluded that learning activities could be blended to achieve a functional balance between accessibility, scholarship and technology. The literature therefore offers encouraging perspectives that endorse blended learning.

Importance of the Student–teacher Relationship

An issue for blending learning design in HEIs is the extent to which student learning is influenced by the student–teacher relationship. Evidence from mental health research around self-help may be relevant, because self-help and online studying both represent changes to traditional face-to-face guidance. Studies have shown reliably better outcomes from online, telephone or book-based therapies if patients feel supported by their relationship with the practitioner (Richardson and Richards, 2006; Lovell et al., 2006; Gellatly et al., 2007; Bee et al.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2014.11.010
0260-6917/© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

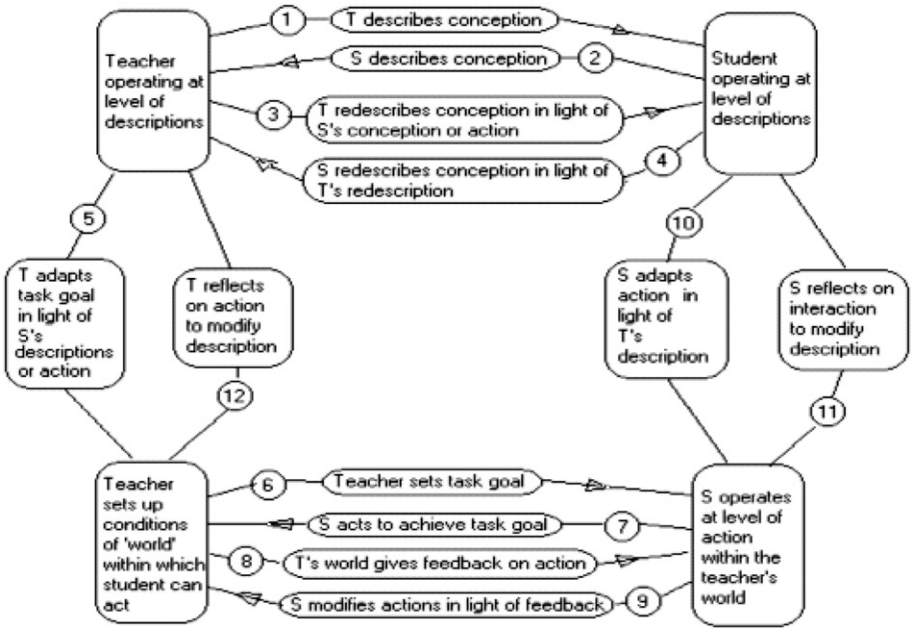

Fig. 1. Conversational model of teaching (Laurillard, 1993:103).

2010). Similarly, anecdotal evidence from colleagues within our nursing department suggests that students engage better with online learning when it is part of blended learning. Our experience resonates with Brookfield's (2006) view that students learn better in a supportive emotional environment. Therefore, there is support in the literature for ensuring that blended learning includes meaningful personal contact with a teacher.

Using Technology to Enhance Social Inclusion in University Communities

UK universities have a widening participation agenda, and nursing attracts a diverse student population. In our experience of nursing education, students who are unfamiliar with university culture sometimes reveal they are so intimidated by the large university libraries that they avoid them; yet the virtual university library enables them to explore their subject without triggering feelings of social inadequacy. In a well-run virtual learning environment (VLE), teachers can make rich resources readily available. Using the VLE, students can attend lectures, visit a library, participate in seminars, and develop networks, all in cyberspace. Thus a technology enhanced environment may be a powerful force for social inclusion.

Some of our nursing students have limited academic skills before entering university, and some have difficult personal circumstances, social disadvantage, health problems or disabilities — typically in our department, around 13% of our nursing undergraduates have declared a disability. However students who have, for instance, specific learning difficulties or sensory impairment, can manipulate visual and audio settings within the VLE to improve accessibility. Our department's VLE offers 24 h access to carefully selected and structured learning resources. Using phased release, we can create and structure online course materials. Early access to materials for individual students can be arranged if agreed. Online resources can be studied at the student's convenience, thereby reducing difficulties around child care, travelling into campus, and part time working which are known to be important barriers to engagement (Pryjmachuk and Richards, 2007). Finally, there is also a growing body of rigorous evidence (e.g. Gomes et al., 2011) to suggest that students engage better in deep learning if they have control over the timing of study periods.

Project 1: Recognising and Addressing a Need for Additional Study Skills Support

In our department, many student support mechanisms are accessed via the VLE in the first instance. In theory, students can readily find out where or who to turn to for help with personal and course related concerns. Nevertheless we noticed a specific issue around study skills support. There seemed to be raised anxieties amongst students enrolled on a particular Level 5 module, concerning their ability to write the course assignment (an essay of 2500 words). As caring educators, module staff were responding with time-consuming, individual academic coaching. When we recognised this, we felt that such ad hoc support was inequitable and inefficient, and we therefore looked for a fairer and more effective way of responding to the issue.

We explored the module feedback from this cohort (see Fig. 2). The feedback was received between the end of the module and the submission date for a summative assignment. This indicated that the students felt they should have had more assignment support during the module. However, the proportion of teaching time devoted to the assignment was higher than that devoted to any of the clinical topics, so we did not wish to increase this. The teaching team, the department, and external examiners were confident in the assignment guidelines. In view of these perspectives, we reflected on what might be driving students' perceptions of their support needs. Drawing on Brookfield's work (Brookfield, 2006) we speculated that some of the concerns about assignment support might stem from low confidence, rather than low competence. Therefore, we designed an extra-curricular blended learning resource with the aim of enhancing generic study skills and self confidence. We presented it to the cohort as an optional extra.

Our blended learning model combined four, 50 min, face-to-face study skills sessions on topics such as 'Understanding the marking criteria' and 'What is critical analysis?'. We delivered the sessions to groups of around 20 students, with online materials available from the VLE. These included: an open access resource about study skills; a YouTube video about academic writing; and a new online writing group. To avoid any licensing problems, all the resources were provided via hyperlinks. We also reproduced links directing students to extremely

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10316418

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/10316418

Daneshyari.com