



Social Work Research Methods

Talking About... Learning & Teaching: Case Study 005



University of Birmingham

Start Date: Summer 2008

Students: Year 1 MA (46 in first co-hort)

Type: Enquiry-based Blended Learning

Scope: Research methods development throughout programme

Technology: Web CT, Echo360 Lecture Capture

Learning Environment: Online lectures, face-to-face and online seminars, self-guided enquiry-based exercises

Initiative Introduction: Module within a programme of study

Impact: Embedded within the programme for MA Social Work cohorts from 2007/2008 academic year onwards

Design Team: Dr Nicki Ward (Lecturer); Dr Nathan Hughes (Lecturer) Tarsem Singh Cooner (Associate Director CEIMH)

The development of this initiative was supported by the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health

Introduction

This flexible enquiry-based blended learning design was created to improve student engagement in the development of research skills and knowledge. The primary aim was to develop a more responsive teaching and learning approach to promote deeper learning outcomes.

Evaluation of previous teaching identified two primary issues that needed addressing in order to engage students more effectively in learning around research. Firstly, the postgraduate students came to the module with different levels of previous knowledge and understanding. Some had significant prior knowledge of research methods and experienced material as repetitive or simplistic whilst those whose knowledge of research was limited found some of the material hard to access and understand; this resulted in students becoming disengaged from the learning process. Secondly the research teaching occurred early in the programme, and some considerable time before the students became engaged in independent research for their dissertations. A flexible approach was required that could be used over a 12–18 month period.

Learning Design

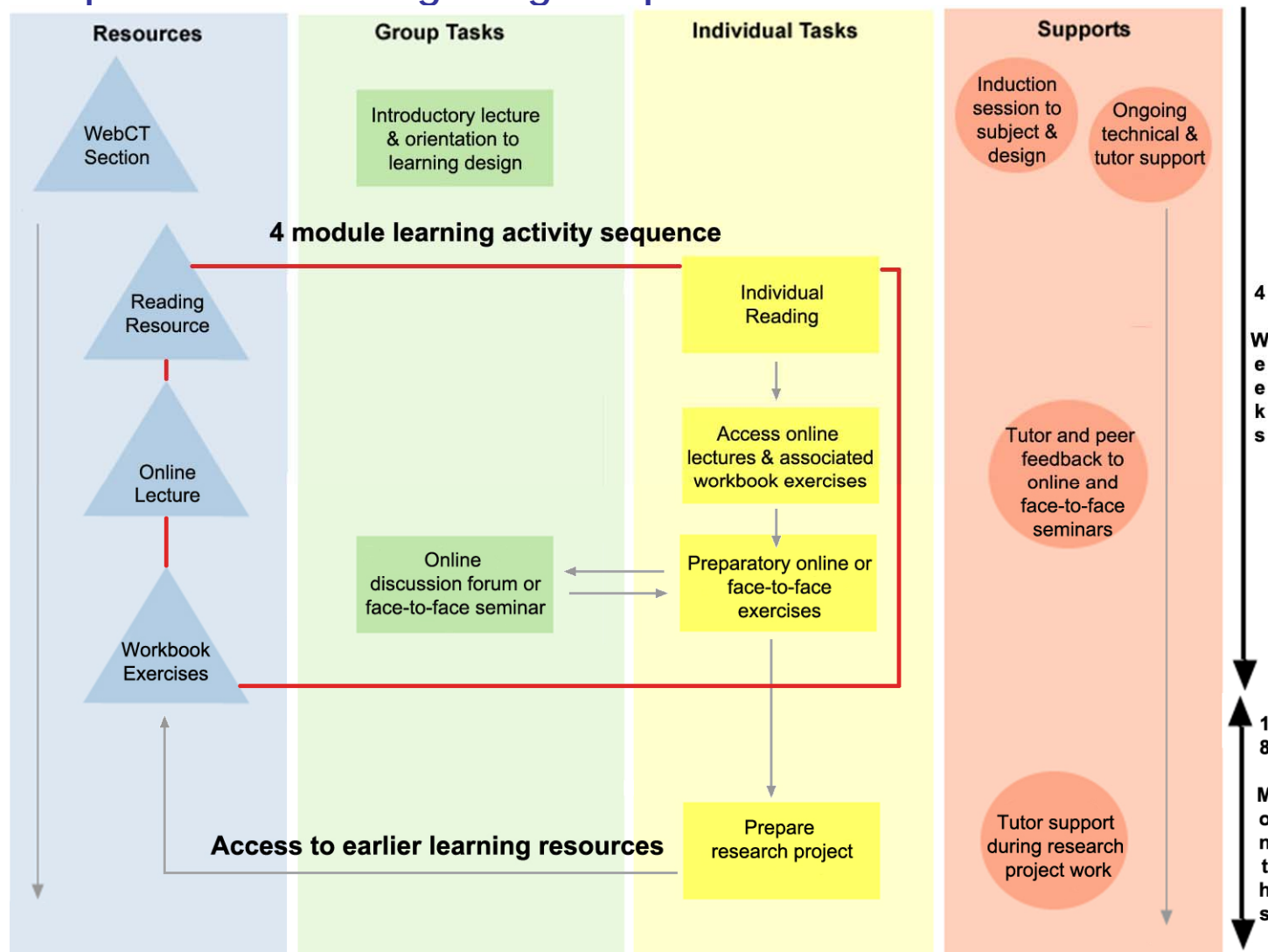
The redesigned module had a number of components including online lectures, face-to-face and online seminars, guided reading and independent enquiry-based learning activities. The activities were designed to be completed over a 4 week period, providing students with time to reflect on learning and develop at their own pace. The activities were guided by a workbook and helped students develop their thinking around their own research interests. The students were orientated to the learning design by a face-to-face lecture that included an introduction to research methods in a social work context. Students were provided with a reading pack containing a copy of the articles needed to complete the workbook exercises along with guidance on how to use the online resources. The workbook was divided into four learning modules. Each module included some enquiry-based independent learning and one or more online lectures. Each module was punctuated with a group seminar or online discussion at a fixed point in the programme. The students were made aware they had to complete the workbook exercises and participate in the group activities, but they could decide on whether or not they viewed the online lectures, depending on their assessment of their learning needs. This approach meant students could make an informed decision, based on their previous knowledge and experience, about what learning input they required in order to complete the learning activities.

The flexible learning design provided access to these materials throughout the two year programme, allowing students to reuse specific resources as they developed interests in particular approaches

Summary

Since its development in 2008 the learning design has been adapted to form part of a more in depth programme of research teaching. The team within the Institute are now exploring ways of developing and applying a similar design in other parts of the programme in order to provide an enquiry-based blended learning approach that addresses the diverse needs of the students and programme.

Temporal Plan: Learning Design Sequence



Student Learning Outcomes

- Develop knowledge of research methods and consider the value of research in a social work context.
- Consider different concepts for assessing research quality and ethics and apply this knowledge.
- Have explored different philosophical and ideological influences underpinning research.
- Be able to distinguish between different research methods and judge the suitability of different data collection methods to answering different research questions.
- Be aware of potential ethical and practical issues involved in accessing a variety of research contexts.
- Be able to translate broad topic interests into coherent research questions.

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Further Information about lecture capture: www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/facilities/EchoRecording.shtml

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