University of Birmingham

Start Date: January 2002

Students: 150 per year

Type: Distance

Discipline: Education / Continuing Professional Development

URL: www.webautism.bham.ac.uk

Technology: WebCT / Media Player, Audio, Video

Approach: Enquiry-based learning (EBL), eLearning, role-play, group work, community of practice.

Learning Environment: Online presentations and case studies/scenarios; audiovisual clips; online synchronous and asynchronous discussions.

Initial Funding: Shirley Foundation

Impact: Aspects adopted and developed by Department, School & College.

Design Team: Dr Karen Guldberg, Andrea MacLeod, Dr Kerstin Wittemeyer, Paul Edwards, Claire Robson.

Introduction

The University of Birmingham's University Certificate (ASD) and Certificate of Higher Education (ASD) are undergraduate level, part time CPD (Continuous Professional Development) courses for practitioners and carers who work with individuals on the autism spectrum. Students study by distance and belong to different regional or online tutor groups headed by a tutor who is an experienced practitioner in the field.

The majority of students have chosen to undertake the course because they want to improve their practice and become better at supporting individuals who are on the autism spectrum. Due to their personal or professional experience in the field, the majority of students are very passionate about their work and have this passion in common before they arrive on the course. The student group is geographically diverse (enabling participants to share different practices in different areas) and they come from a range of different settings, including parents, people who work with children and people who work with adults. A range of professions is represented, including teachers, speech and language therapists, parents, psychologists and support workers in adult services.

Learning Design

The Learning environment has been designed so that students can interact regularly and in doing so, expand and develop their practice 'in the real world'. Online 'Time to Talks' give them the opportunity to share concerns, passions about a topic or a set of problems, through mutual engagement, joint enterprise towards shared goals and shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998). This helps students to learn through and in their contexts of work, thus having more potential for transforming that practice. A community of practice model is particularly suited to these students who arrive in the "university classroom to acquire knowledge in one formal context in order to transfer it to another practical context " (Polin, 2008, p 267).
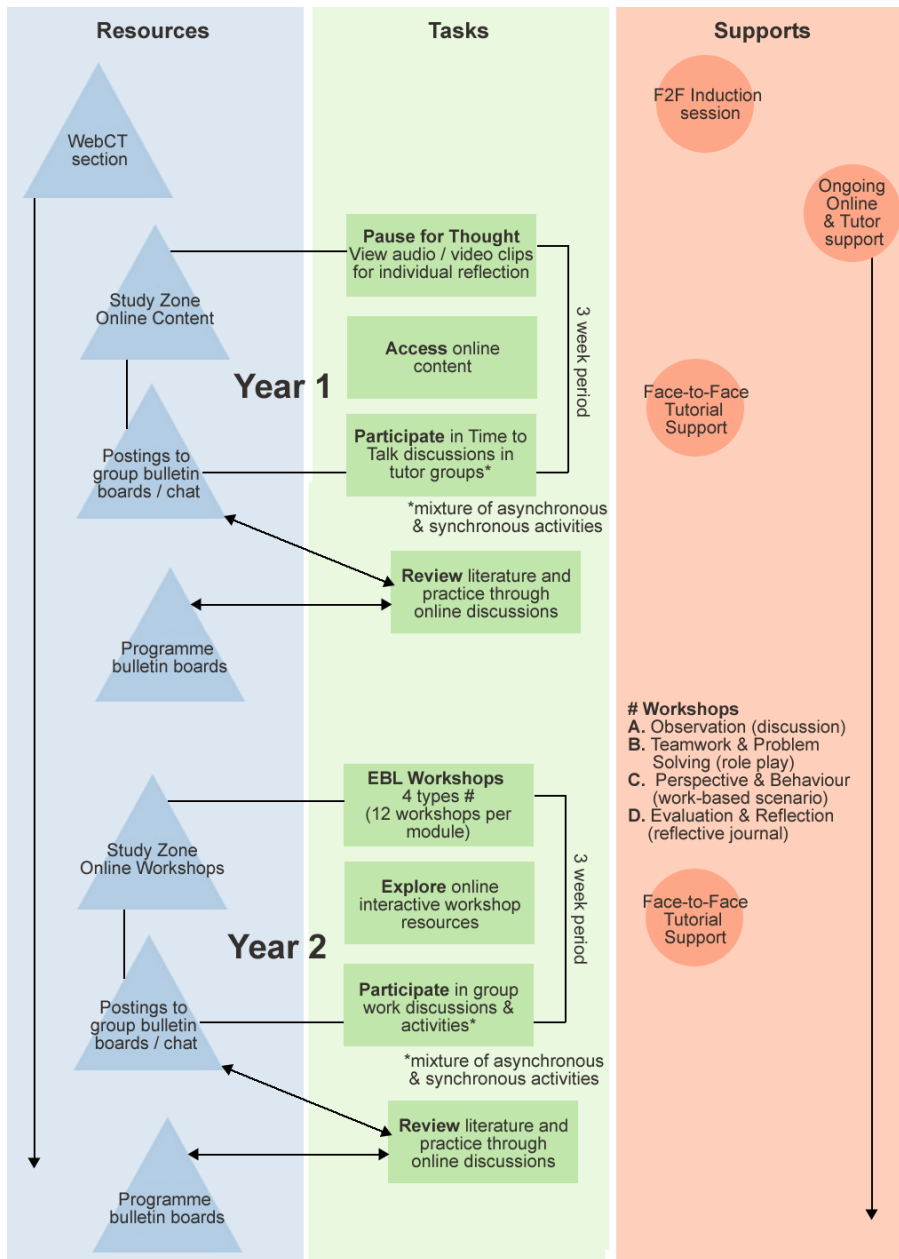
Summary

The aims of the course are to enable reflective practice and experiential learning. These aims align well with the community of practice framework. Through collaborative engagement on the course, students can bring their experiences 'out there' into the course and can discuss those in a safe and supportive space. This enables them to talk about 'practice about' and 'practice from within' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The course enables students to move back and forth between formal learning and the boundary communities in which they are located. This interrelationship between a learner identity, work or carer based identity and new identity (Reeves and Forde, 2004) has been powerful in terms of potentially changing practice.

> "This Programme of Study is groundbreaking both in terms of content and method of delivery. It has been a marvellous success and consistently leads the field in the delivery of high quality qualifications in the world of autism."
> *Comment by the external commentator for the five-year review*

Temporal Plan: Learning Design Sequence

Resources

WebCT section

Study Zone Online Content

Year 1

Postings to group bulletin boards / chat

Programme bulletin boards

Study Zone Online Workshops

Year 2

Postings to group bulletin boards / chat

Programme bulletin boards

Tasks

Pause for Thought
View audio / video clips for individual reflection

Access online content

Participate in Time to Talk discussions in tutor groups*

*mixture of asynchronous & synchronous activities

Review literature and practice through online discussions

3 week period

EBL Workshops
4 types #
(12 workshops per module)

Explore online interactive workshop resources

Participate in group work discussions & activities*

*mixture of asynchronous & synchronous activities

Review literature and practice through online discussions

3 week period

Supports

F2F Induction session

Ongoing Online & Tutor support

Face-to-Face Tutorial Support

 # Workshops
A. Observation (discussion)
B. Teamwork & Problem Solving (role play)
C. Perspective & Behaviour (work-based scenario)
D. Evaluation & Reflection (reflective journal)

Face-to-Face Tutorial Support

Further Information

Guldberg, Karen and Pilkington, Rachel (2009) Conditions for productive networked learning among professionals and careers. In Lone Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Chris Jones, Berner Lindstrom (Ed.) Analysing Networked Learning Practices in Higher Education and Continuing Professional Development (pp. 63–84). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Guldberg, Karen(2008) 'Adult learners and professional development: peer-to-peer learning in a networked community', International Journal of Lifelong Education, 27: 1, 35–49.

Guldberg, Karen and Pilkington, Rachel (2007) Tutor roles in Facilitating Reflection on Practice Through Online Discussion, *Journal of Educational Technology* & Society, 10: 1, 61–72.

Guldberg, Karen and Pilkington, Rachel (2006) A community of practice approach to the development of non-traditional learners through networked learning, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 22: 3, 159–171.

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