Chapter 10
Learning from Each Other?
Using Technology to Develop Collaborative Learning in Clinical Education

Helen Bradbury
University of Leeds, UK

Melissa Highton
Oxford University, UK

Rebecca O’Rourke
University of Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT
This chapter discusses and evaluates the introduction of collaborative e-learning activities into an interprofessional teacher education programme, a Master of Education in Clinical Education (MEd CE). The activity involved designing an educational research methodology module. The authors chose educational research methods as the task focus because, although the students had some familiarity with research methods, researching clinical education was new to them all. This task enabled participants to learn about educational research methods, course design and e-learning tools, resources and pedagogy. The process enhanced collaborative and interprofessional learning.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter offers a case study in interprofessional education that promoted collaborative learning through e-learning. It discusses and evaluates the introduction of collaborative e-learning activities into an interprofessional teacher education programme, a Master of Education in Clinical Education (MEd CE). Now in its 5th year, the MEd developed from, and continues to run alongside, a successful Post-Graduate Certificate. The activity involved designing an educational research methodology module and enabled participants to learn about educational research methods, course design and e-learning tools, resources and pedagogy. We chose educational research methods as the task focus because, although the students had some familiarity with research methods, researching clinical education was new to them all.

Evidence of interprofessional learning is notoriously hard to capture (Barr 2007) and our experience was no different. It has been easier
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to identify and evaluate the engagement with e-
learning than to identify interprofessional learning. Nevertheless, collaborative learning both within
and across professional groupings clearly takes
place, especially in relation to learning how to use
the technology to complete the online task. This
learning scaffolds the process of learning about
educational research methods and course design
for the participants. Learning about technology and
educational research methods creates trust across
the group which makes it possible for them to chal-
lenge and debate their individual research studies
on an equal but different professional standing.

We explore the introduction of this activity
from the standpoint of the students and the course
team, taking Salmon’s Five Stage model of e-
moderation (Salmon, 2000) as a guide. We draw
on two sources of information for this chapter.
First, a content analysis of material generated by
the students on the programme, which is explored
in relation to the experience of e-learning and
interprofessional collaborative learning. These
materials, used with permission from the health
care professionals involved, include individual
reflective accounts (which formed part of the
module assessment) and records of the on-line
interactions from the collaborative task. Sec-
ond, we used appreciative inquiry methodology
(Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) to chart the
experience of the course director as she worked
with Gilly Salmon’s principles (Salmon, 2000,
2002) to introduce, review and refine elements of
e-learning into what has now become a ‘blended
learning’ programme (Littlejohn, 2007).

The chapter begins by outlining the educational
and professional contexts within which the course
is situated. We briefly describe the course and
the online activity which forms the basis of this
chapter before discussing the main themes and
issues which emerge from our evaluation. Finally,
we reflect on the implications of our experience
for others.

Educational and
Professional Context

Integrating technology into practice requires a
considered, reflective approach to course and cur-
riculum design to ensure learning needs and teach-
ing aims are met. Blended learning means more
than having some face-to-face and some online
elements. It describes the extent to which these
elements work together to give a cohesive learner
experience and the choice of the best tools for the
task. Littlejohn (2007) suggests that the design
and subsequent success of a blend is subject to
three contexts: the learner’s context, the teacher’s
context and the technology context. Each of these
also exists in relation to interprofessional learning,
which is itself a far from straightforward practice.

There is a small body of work exploring the
practice of introducing e-learning in clinical edu-
cation. The majority of this work (Connor, 2003;
Morgan, 2006) is concerned with the experience
of under-graduates, as are studies of interprofes-
sional education, which tend to centre on clinical
practice rather than clinical practitioners as clinical
educators (Barr, 2007; Peacock & Hooper, 2006).
We explore the extent to which findings from this
work are replicated or challenged in the specific
context of our case study, which focuses on the
introduction of collaborative e-learning to an
interprofessional group of experienced clinical
practitioners undertaking a clinical education
programme.

The themes and issues we address include:
the experience and preconceptions of participants
with regard to their knowledge of e-learning; the
need for clinical educators to develop a critical
stance towards the dominant forms of e-learning
available in their professional clinical practice; the
need to design an authentic online activity which
promotes critical thinking; and the development
of collaborative learning across interprofessional
groups. In their study of a postgraduate course
delivered entirely online, Nicol and Sinclair (2003)
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