Chapter XX

Investigating and Encouraging Student Nurses’ ICT Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions rely increasingly on information and communications technology (ICT) to provide learning opportunities. Written to support this enterprise, the Guidelines for Networked Learning in Higher Education (Goodyear & NLinHE Team, 2001) carefully blend theory and practice to provide a wealth of sound advice for course design teams. The focus is on “promoting connections” that directly relate to learning. However, in nursing, 6 years after the Guidelines were published, levels of students’ skills and engagement with ICT remain problematic, which undermines attempts to deploy networked learning. I argue that for such initiatives to succeed, other, more foundational connections need also to be promoted. I focus on some of the factors that contribute to student nurses’ ICT non-engagement: gender, caring, professional identity, and knowledge work. Finally, I explain how some of the barriers identified can be overcome through integrating ICT. HE programs can provide students with meaningful encounters with ICT in the different elements of a course: curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment, as well as informal learning through online forums. If successful, this integration can promote the students’ development of working knowledge in ICT, and increase the chances of their engagement in networked learning and evidence-based practice.
The JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) funded “Effective networked learning in higher education: notes and guidelines” (hereafter simply the “Guidelines”) was written “to support teachers in higher education who are thinking seriously about making use of networked learning” (Guidelines p. 4). Since the Guidelines were published, learning technologies such as virtual learning environments (VLE) have been deployed throughout Further and Higher education in the United Kingdom (Joint Information Systems Committee, 2004). The Guidelines’ “language, constructs, models, theoretical insights and evidence” (Guidelines p. 5) are as needful today as ever.

Networked learning is defined in the Guidelines as: “Learning in which information and communications technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources.” (Guidelines p. 9)

The loose coupling of technology to student activity, implied by the central notion of promoting connections, is well suited to study at university, with its climate of autonomous learning. However, technological “solutions” bring their own layers of complexity and, in spite of their being extremely well informed, the Guidelines do not sufficiently promote connections of a more foundational nature, that is, access to and engagement with ICT in the minds and lives of students.” (Guidelines p. 9)

In my role as ICT lecturer, it used to surprise me that not everyone shared the same blasé attitude to using ICT as I do. Many of the ICT workshops I ran were poorly attended, and a significant proportion of those who did come did not even know their log in details. It would be easy to fall in with uninformed prejudice and write off nurses as technophobic, but the reasons for non-engagement are more complex and, moreover, usually rational. For example, Donald Norman is scathing towards hardware and software designers for accentuating the mismatch between “rampant featurism” and the practical needs of users (Cuban, 2001; Norman, 1999). At the most prosaic and yet telling level, Neil Selwyn et al. (Selwyn, Gorard,
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