

Exploring Online and Blended Course Delivery in Group Work

SPARC Project Annual Update

Progress of the Project

Exploring Online and Blended Course Delivery in Group Work. The proposed research project aims to augment the current knowledge base on the use of technology in teaching groups in social work. The project will address the challenge of teaching methods and presentation skills that encourage university students to seek creativity and critical reflection. The focus of this paper will be blended learning as a mixture of face-to-face and online learning. Emphasis will be placed on preparing instructors in effectively preparing blended learning in order to create opportunities for social work student to be engaged, critical and reflective.

Blended learning has been defined as combining “face- to- face traditional classroom setting with distance delivery methods... it all comes back to teaching methodologies-pedagogies that change according to the unique needs of learners. Those who use blended learning are trying to maximize the benefits of both face- to- face and online methods- using the web for what it does best, and using class time for what it does best” (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003, p. 227). Distance learning has raised many concerns among social work educators as to how best deliver social work education using the information and communication technologies that are dominant today (East, LaMendola & Alter, 2014; Maidment, 2005).

In addition to exploring the benefits and challenges of integrating technology into teaching group work, the proposed project explores blended and online group dynamics of students in small groups. The purpose of the project is to provide facilitators of online

groups in social group work courses tools for creating environments conducive to communication and group work learning consistent with the Standards of Social Work with Groups (2006).

As of date, the researchers have completed a draft research paper which triangulates various findings from group work literature on blended learning. This includes an extensive literature review on opportunities of group work in blended delivery including the learning of critical thinking, processing group conflict, developing as a group, and fostering student-instructor, student-student and student-course relationships. These findings have been analyzed in the context of the Standards of Social Work with Groups (2006) and recommendations have been drafted which propose to align delivery of group work courses to the Standards of Social Work with Groups. The survey responses of 51 respondents from one undergraduate and two graduate social work with groups courses from the University of Windsor have been analyzed. The results provide insight into and indicators of students' experience of blended learning. The next steps of the research project involves editing the draft research paper and submitting the abstract to various group work and teaching related conferences and journal articles.

Evaluation of Achievement of Objectives

The learning outcomes of this project on blended learning in group work are as follow:

1. To engage students in post-secondary education by exploring the effectiveness of integrating face-to-face and online teaching of group work.
2. To explore possibilities in extending and integrating experiential activities performed in the classroom to online course websites.

3. To provide innovative, useful, and convenient approaches for educating social work students.
4. To demonstrate dynamics and processes that are characteristic of individual growth and development in group work.
5. To develop a balance between allowing students to create and experience roles on their own and faculty assignment of roles.
6. To promote online chatting that extends linguistic opportunities for participation in small-group settings in an egalitarian manner.
7. To use findings in existing practices in social work group courses in recommending future use.
8. To develop international alliances, connections, and practices with social work educators in other countries.

The content of the findings and analysis, as well as suggested recommendations will be reflected in the above, proposed outcomes. A further evaluation will occur during the editing phase. The final project will be completed and submitted to various conferences and journals. The final draft of the research paper will be available for submission within the next few months.

Information to Support Dissemination

The final research paper will be submitted and presented (pending approval) to the following upcoming conferences:

Canadian Association for Social Work Education- 2016
International Association for Social Work with Groups- 2016

The recommendations of the research will also be provided to the University of Windsor Centre for Teaching and Learning with the aim for implementation at the university.