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Scaffolding and supporting virtual communities

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Starting Point

‘Young People have a strong impetus to connect and socialise with their peers online’ (Thomas, 2011:10)

- Promote autonomy and collaboration
- Privacy settings and challenges.
- Using social networking sites professionally.
- Isolated on placement: mentoring support.
- Building virtual communities.

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Methodology

- Setting up of Facebook pages 2 professionally endorsed undergraduate courses
- Professional use and safeguarding
- Childhood Studies student led Facebook page
- Questionnaires and evaluation
- Listening to students’ voices
Questioning Community

‘You don’t build a community by building one’ Valerie Hey (SRHE, Feb 2012)

• Are these 3 Facebook (FB) pages real communities?
• Who should build a FB community?
• Whose needs are these pages satisfying?
• What size is an effective FB community?
• Are we enforcing sociability spaces on students?
• Lave and Wenger (1991:94) questioned the control of the learning community and ‘legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice’. Is using Facebook inclusive? What about the ‘lurkers’ and the non users?
YOUTH AND COMMUNITY WORK

2% Still don’t use Facebook

23% Good for support/to share information or questions.

7.5% Think it helps to get to know people/develop community.

93% Think it would be a good idea to keep this page after the first year.

72% think the Youth & Community shared page is a good idea!

7.5% Think it helps to get to know people/develop community.

40% Have posted something on the page and 48% read what others have put.

48% use it only when receive a notification.
Broke the ice first day of Uni
30+ students met outside to
go to first class.

95% of people who took
part in our survey would
like Facebook to continue

Childhood Studies Year One
Early Primary

Student feedback

- 47% of 1st years posted on the site but most of the remaining 53% gained help from reading other posts.
- 100% comments very positive about staff presence on site.
- 100% want SOS to continue and still have mentors from 3rd years

"We must stay in touch when we are at placement - it can be so lonely!!"
Reflections:
‘You don’t build a community by building one’

• Are these FB pages real communities?
• Who should build a FB community?
• Whose needs are these pages satisfying?
• What size is an effective FB community of practice?
• Are we enforcing sociability spaces on students?
• Lave and Wenger (1991:94) questioned the control of the learning community and ‘legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice’. Is Facebook inclusive? What about the ‘lurkers’ and the non users?
Our thoughts and questions

- Only 2% of youth work students said that they would use the FB page cf 85% said that they would use face to face contact to discuss an issue with peers.
- Should virtual mentoring for placement students be further developed?
- Does virtual mentoring need tutor presence?
- If no tutor presence on FB page does this become ‘the blind leading the blind’?
- Student only page and professionalism?
- Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) critique of the ‘cotton wool approach’ - therapeutic education that is not needed and doesn’t benefit students in the long run
• Gosden (2007) ‘Students’ trial by Facebook’ *The Guardian*
• Kennedy (2010) ‘The trouble with Facebook’ *The Guardian*