Narrative 4

John Cossar is the course leader for the BSc Physiotherapy course in the School of Health Sciences & Social Care. This 3-year undergraduate course aims to prepare students for professional autonomy and excellence in practice. To achieve this aim, the course provides students with opportunities to acquire a sound scientific foundation, develop excellent clinical skills and a well-developed ability to clinically reason, which are essential in order to safely and effectively treat patients.

Despite the fact that the BSc Physiotherapy course has traditionally been well-received by students (including the teaching, feedback, study guides and technology enhanced learning provision), the Physiotherapy team was concerned that the increased provision of learning materials and support could lead to students becoming increasingly passive and taking less responsibility for their learning. The course design team therefore agreed that a change was required: students need to take more responsibility for their learning.

This course was considered a suitable candidate for the OULDI project given the fact that it is being redesigned for the academic year 2011/12 with a view to adopting Brunel's new 'SR21' approach to design. The course team was therefore invited to participate in Brunel's Second Blended Learning Design Workshop (modelled on the 'OU Design Challenge').

Fig. 1 Physiotherapy Course Design team working at the Blended Learning Design Workshop

John Cossar and Alan Esnouf represented the Physiotherapy course team at the workshop in July 2010. They were given an opportunity to explore the Pedagogy Profile and the 'at a glance' Course Map tools from the OU design toolkit, to facilitate the exploration of their chosen design (supported by a member of the university's Learning Design Team). The examples below demonstrate the ways in which they used the tools to provide alternative representations of their course provision. Additionally the Course Team engaged with Cloudworks in order to share and discuss their designs.

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[1] SR2: Literally 'Senate Regulation 2' – A recently proposed institutional policy change from a module-based to a level-based approach
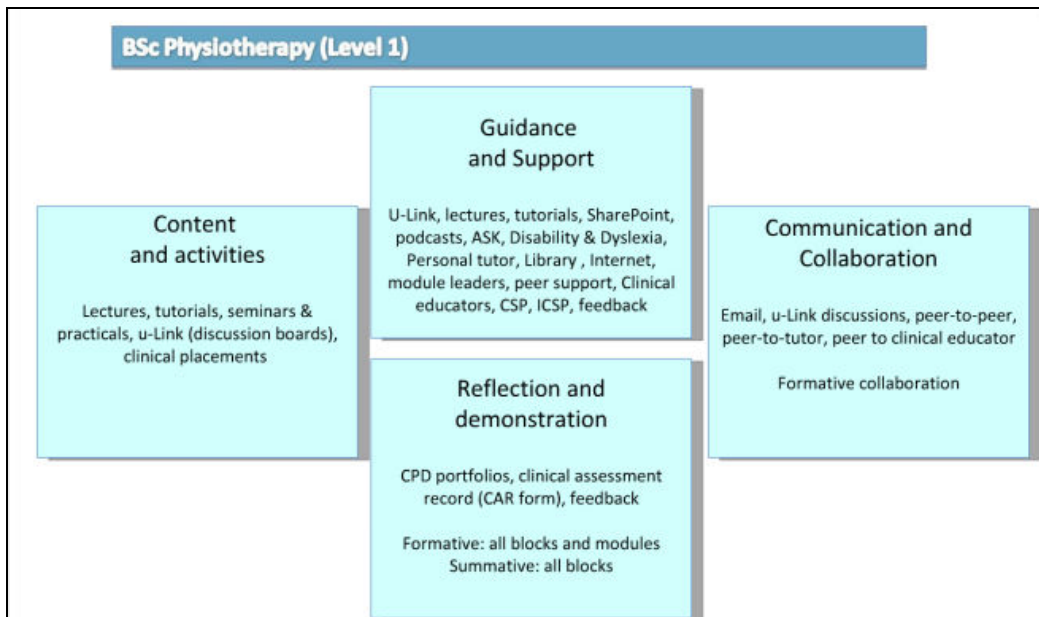to curriculum design

Fig 2. 'At a glance' Course Map representation of the proposed top-level design for the BSc Physiotherapy from the Blended Learning Design workshop
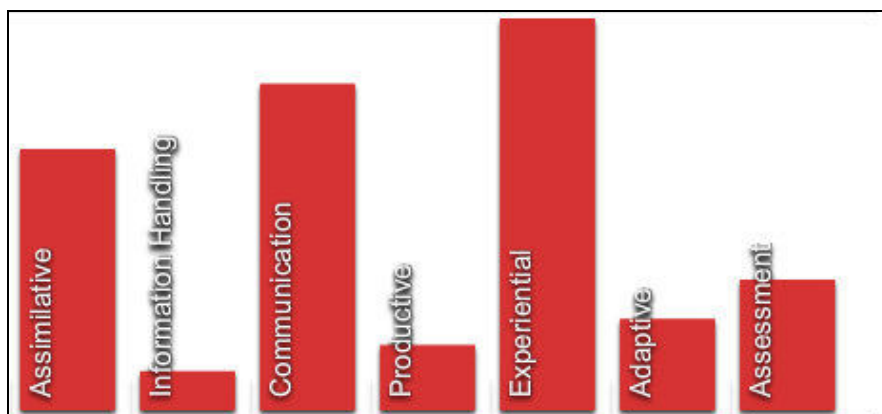

Fig 3. Pedagogy Profile representing the proposed top-level design for the BSc Physiotherapy from the Blended Learning Design workshop

John explained that the learning design tools presented to the Physiotherapy team gave them an opportunity to work together on that day and "helped us to think about the course and viewing it from different perspectives" (Appendix 12.1.1 : Interview with John Cossar).

> "The day influenced our thinking about the course. We … split our course into study blocks…We pulled everything apart and redesigned this."

This was deemed useful at an early stage of the course design process. Furthermore, John indicated that he found the discussions emerging from Cloudworks very interesting and useful.

However, the tools were not used in subsequent course design activities outside of the workshop. Although they were deemed useful, the use of what was called 'educational jargon' (e.g. 'assimilative' learning) was a deterrent in the further engagement with the tools

and theories presented. They also represented an investment of time, which was already a scarce resource. John explains:

> "We have not used any of the tools directly, but the principles have been used, including the ways in which we could structure and link teaching to assessment. This certainly influenced our discussion and the way we thought about the course. The tools were probably not the best approach for us, but indirectly we were able to use the underlying principles."

Overall, the initiative gave the course team an opportunity to consider their learning design approach. Although the perceived lack of academic time to fully engage with the learning design tools, and the use of jargon were deterrents, they nevertheless served to set the basis for dialogue and facilitated the consideration of the design from different perspectives.

The short term impact of the tools was therefore experienced within the context of the workshop. However, the longer term impact was demonstrated in influencing the 'mindset' of the participants involved on the day, through utilising the principles from the workshop. The most tangible output from the workshop was the fact that it reinforced the decision of the Physiotherapy team to proceed with the use of PebblePad within their course provision, as John explains:

> "The consideration of the course design using the tools triggered the thinking about IT backup for [the course]. We were thinking about PebblePad during that day. PebblePad fitted in with our needs very well. It allowed us to connect with students right through the course and up until and after they graduate, to encourage CPD, especially as part of professional requirements."

When considering the issue of technology enhanced learning provision, John suggested that "although PebblePad for course provision was being considered earlier, the workshop reinforced the decision to use PebblePad". It appears therefore that the workshop played a role in helping to confirm earlier decisions regarding course design.

Collaboration was influenced "Indirectly…not a great deal. The insights from the workshop certainly influenced how we discussed the issues." John's explanation about traditional course team collaboration is insightful in this regard:

> "I don't believe that there was anything wrong with the IT tools, but rather, the circumstances that we were in. It is difficult to get the programme team to 'buy in'.
>
> Programme redesign takes a lot of meetings, so you can get a lot of meeting fatigue and IT fatigue! Looking back, it took 7-8 programme team meetings to redesign the whole programme over 12-18 months… so not much time to introduce this new concept. To have to think about using new technologies as part of this process would have meant spending more time learning about them. It is hard enough to get the team along for a meeting….perhaps if we, as a team, had more time?"

Cultural factors (such as the perceived amount of time available and perceived investment of time) therefore appear to be a major factor influencing both collaboration and engagement with the various interventions. Certainly the time investment required for learning about the system represented a deterrent, as John explained:

> "The programme team already use a variety of different systems and therefore having to learn about a new system prevented further engagement. Learning a new system also involves learning the language of the system".

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the 'pen and paper' approach to learning design was favoured in this instance.

Language used within the tools was also highlighted as a deterrent to the course team's engagement outside the workshop, as John explained:

"A lot of things we were trying to do in our own language mirrored what we wanted to do, but the jargon used during the day actually deterred us. This also applied to the theory and the systems used, which were inaccessible to the teams due to the jargon used."

Overall, however, the interventions influenced their thinking about the course, as John indicated that they were able to organise the assessed study blocks "We pulled everything apart and redesigned this". The underlying pedagogical principles also enabled John to consider ways of linking teaching to assessment and although it has not affected the Physiotherapy team's collaborative working approach, it has certainly reinforced the importance of learning design.

Since the redesign the course has successfully undergone approval by the Health Professions Council, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the University. Indeed the Programme received the following commendations

- o The Panel commends the broad consultation and detailed, thorough rethinking undertaken by the programme team in redesigning the programme.

- o The Panel commends the innovative application of the programme design freedoms provided by the new SR2 regulations.

Since the redesigned course is not being implemented until 2011/12, there is no student data available to support the impact on students. However, an initial survey of students (Appendix 12.3) reinforces the decision that the course design team should consider implementation of PebblePad at an earlier stage in the course.