

**‘Seeing the bigger picture’: a post-graduate online learning community facilitates political competence for occupational therapists**

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**‘Seeing the bigger picture’: how a post-graduate online learning  
community facilitates political competence for occupational  
therapists.**

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# **‘Seeing the bigger picture’: how a post-graduate online learning community facilitates political competence for occupational therapists.**

## Abstract

Occupational therapists are increasingly required to work beyond traditional health care settings in new and emerging community roles. This study explored the learning experiences of a cohort of international students studying an online post-graduate module aimed at facilitating political competence. The evaluation used an ethnographic approach and methods included: online data from online communication tools: semi-structured interviews, and tutors’ reflective diaries. Data was subjected to thematic analysis. Results showed shifts in students’ knowledge, skills and attitudes in: seeing the bigger picture; developing collaborative partnerships and navigating the politics of practice at the margins of personal, political and professional positions. Themes from learning which promoted changes were interacting with online resources, valuing and sharing experiences, a safe and supportive environment, integrated learning and assessment, critical self and peer review. Importantly the democratic approach of online learning was shown to align with the principles of political and critical occupational therapy practice. Online learning within an international community can extend opportunities for developing professional knowledge and behaviours in the politics of community-based practice.

Keywords: online learning, community-based practice, occupational therapy, political competence, post-graduate learning.

## **Introduction**

'Occupational Therapy in Wider Contexts' is the final 30 credit 12 week mandatory module of the MSc (post-registration) Occupational Therapy distance learning course at Sheffield Hallam University in the UK. Consistent with the trend for online learning in higher education across the globe (Ferguson and Tryjankowski 2009, Islam, Beer and Slack 2015) and in both undergraduate and graduate occupational therapy courses (Hollis and Madhill 2006), the module has been delivered entirely through Blackboard Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The module aims were to promote political competence in occupational therapists as they navigated increasingly complex and diverse health and social care settings across the world, often in collaboration with third sector agencies (Pollard and Voices Talk, Hands Write 2008). Political competence

“...refers to a dynamic set of critical knowledge, skills and attitudes that enables one to engage effectively in situations of conflict and co-operation that are about responding to people’s needs and demonstrating the relevance of the profession” (Pollard, Sakellariou and Kronenberg 2008, 21).

The module was previously taught face to face to pre-registration students to support them while completing role emerging placements in charitable and voluntary organisations where there is little or no established occupational therapy role (Hunter and Volkert, 2016). The main vehicle for learning was the development of an individual sustainable and viable community-based project to meet the occupational needs of a user group which the student identify as 'new' to them. Module content explored power relations through critical theories, social constructionist theorists e.g. Foucault and Illich, relevant international policy, human rights legislation and concepts such as occupational justice, which concerns the right of individuals to take part in meaningful occupations (Townsend, 1993).

This online version initially aimed to reach an international community of occupational therapy post registration students who may not have experienced role emerging placements. Tutors were also interested in exploring online learning as a democratic pedagogy (Ozturk and Hodgson 2017). This interest potentially resonated with the critical and political aims of the module.

The social constructivist approach of online learning aligns well with democratic pedagogy as flexibility across distance and time allows students greater opportunities for dialogue as they control the pace and sequence of their participation (Ruey 2010). This was important for MSc students who were usually studying alongside working and living in different time zones. Further, the non-linear interaction allows for more meaningful reflection and more considered replies and benefits students who are quieter in face-to-face sessions (Probst et al. 2009). Online learning also provides a range of communication opportunities through sharing thoughts, asking questions and providing feedback (Yang, Yeh and Wong 2010) and these can develop important peer-review skills for health professionals (Probst et al. 2009).

In a critical pedagogy all participants are “simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire 1973, 72). This approach is consistent with the principles of online learning where the role of tutors moves from “‘sage on the stage’, to facilitator or ‘guide on the side’” (Hollis and Madhill 2006, 67) and that emphasises, “the importance of developing a community of learners who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding” (Wright 2015).

Students' individual community-based projects from their own local practice represented the learning trigger which positioned the student at the centre of the learning process and provided "pedagogical entry points" with which students could legitimately participate in the online learning community (Taylor 2009, 6). Further, consistent with critical pedagogy it was hoped that engagement with real world projects through community participation would allow students to challenge the status quo and transform social and occupational life beyond the classroom (Freire 1973). A critical evaluation and reflection on this project forms the summative written assignment.

Although different online learning approaches exist, e.g Community of Inquiry (Garrison and Anderson 2003), Sheffield Hallam University Faculty of Health and Wellbeing has historically employed Gilly Salmon's learning approach and practical strategies such as E-tivities (2013), e-Moderation (2011), The Five-Stage Model (2011) and more recently Carpe Diem professional development workshops for online learning (Salmon and Wright 2014). E-moderating is directly linked to creating quality, personal, and effective interactivity between the learner and the teacher (Salmon 2013). It is our intention to refer critically to Salmon's work.

Module design used the scaffolding approach of Salmon's Five-Stage model of Access and Motivation, Online Socialisation, Information Sharing, Knowledge Construction and Development. Tutors expressed different beliefs concerning online learning shaped by their earlier experiences. NP was sceptical about students' engagement based in his experience of delivering online learning to a large cohort. SW had completed professional development courses similar to Carpe Diem (Salmon and Wright 2014) and was confident in online facilitation.

The module was structured into 4 x 3 week sessions each concluding with an e-tivity<sup>1</sup> which invited critical reflection on the shaping of projects. To encourage satisfactory achievement of later phases of Information Sharing, Knowledge Construction and Development e-tivities and critical feedback were carefully graded (see table 1). As this was the final module of the course, students could navigate the Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard) and use different synchronous and asynchronous communication tools such as Blackboard Collaborate<sup>2</sup>, PADLET<sup>3</sup> and discussion boards.

[Insert table 1 around here]

While occupational therapy educators have considered the impact of community participation as an element of learning, none have explored how political competence of post-registration students at the level of community practice is developed in an online learning community where a space is shared relationally rather than physically (Arnold 2015). Social approaches to occupational therapy have been recognised for many years, and for decades occupational therapy educators have been discussing how the sociocultural and economic aspects of practice require a political grounding (Watson and Swartz 2004; Kronenberg, Simo-Algado and Pollard 2005; Lorenzo et al. 2006; Pollard, Kronenberg and Sakellariou 2008). Aldrich (2015) reported an undergraduate occupational science course to enhance understanding of global occupational therapy using community outings and four synchronous one-hour online classroom sessions between U.S. and Swedish students. Course evaluations and reflections revealed how local and global experiential learning can lead to greater understanding of different cultures.

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1 a learning task for facilitating active learning in an online environment.

2 Blackboard Collaborate is a real-time, multi-functional virtual classroom or web conferencing environment.

3 PADLET is an online virtual “bulletin” board, where students and teachers can collaborate, reflect, share links and pictures, in a secure location

The aims of our evaluation were to explore changes in political competence in post-graduate occupational therapists participating in an on-line learning community, and to explore the on-line learning processes which helped and hindered these changes.

## **Methodology**

The evaluation adopted an ethnographic approach, which describes the lives and experiences of people in a community and, as online environments have been established as cultural contexts in their own right this includes online communities (Beneito-Montagut 2011).

## ***Methods***

Research methods were mediated through computer-based technologies. Three sets of qualitative data were collected to ensure greater rigour.

- online data from discussion boards and activities in the VLE
- semi-structured online individual interviews using Skype, an on-line platform.
- tutors reflective diaries

A convenience sample of students (10) were invited by email with accompanying participant information sheet and consent form at the start of the module in 2016. All agreed to participate in an evaluation of online data. Additionally six students agreed to participate in interviews. Digitally recorded interviews using a schedule devised by both authors (See appendix 1) were conducted by NP. These took place after the submission of the final assignment and lasted between 30 and 50 minutes.



### ***Data Analysis:***

The data collection method was thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). One tutor familiarised themselves with the online and interview data and coded features relevant to the research question. Data was scrutinised for reported changes in ways of thinking and acting which demonstrated political competence and learning processes which had helped and hindered these changes. Broader themes and sub themes were discussed and agreed between tutors who used reflective diaries to confirm or challenge findings.

### ***Ethics:***

The study was given ethical approval by Sheffield Hallam University. In order to preserve anonymity some identifying characteristics of the data (for example geographic location of students and precise details of their projects) have been withheld.

### ***Results***

#### ***Participants***

The six students who were interviewed were all female qualified occupational therapists. They were dispersed around the world – 3 were of UK origin, 2 were European and 1 was from the global south. The distribution reflected the international nature of the cohort. Participants were aged between late 20s to early 50s (see table 2).

[Insert table 2 about here]

Reported changes in ways of thinking and acting which demonstrated political competence were as follows (see table 3):

[Insert table 3 about here]

Learning processes which had helped and hindered changes were identified as follows:

- Interacting with online resources,
- Creating a safe and supportive environment,
- Valuing and sharing experiences,
- Integrated learning and assessment,
- Critical self and peer review.

These results represent a summary of the main themes.

### *1. Changes demonstrating political competence*

#### *‘Seeing the bigger picture’*

Some students reported a shift in understanding of the wider political context around practice:

“embedded in social and economic conditions and this influences our position as professionals but also our practice” (Student 3 interview)

The final Padlet activity invited students to share what they would take away personally and professionally from the module and all commented on thinking outside the box.

This was confirmed in interviews:

“Sometimes living in a country where the economic crisis gets worse and worse you lose the desire and vision to do more, but this is actually the time when you need to do more,

and kind of think outside the box of how you are going to accomplish these things...”  
(Student 2 interview)

One student recognised that practice could be more than person centred, such as

“...what can be done environmentally, like the change doesn't have to occur within the person, sometimes the change has to occur outside the person to make them more occupationally successful.” (Student 5 interview)

### *Developing collaborative partnerships*

Students reported being more responsive to collaborative, non-hierarchical working with individuals and communities:

“it's made me more empathic and more responsive personally to the needs of other people and how those needs are not always intrinsic but can be extrinsic as well”  
(Student 5 interview)

“...you have to make sure that you have the community working together with you to actually negotiate that they can feel ownership and continue” (Student 1 interview)

In e-tivity 2 student 2 described her intention to take “a back seat in regards leadership in its more traditional sense of group leader” to empower people she worked with.

Students also developed a range of skills such as negotiation and advocacy as well as project management:

“..I had forgotten that I was an advocate for my clients “ (Student 2 interview)

“...I am more confident that I can get a group of multidisciplinary team coming together for a common purpose and also I had to use a lot of negotiation skills as well “ (Student 1 interview)

Participation in the online community also allowed rehearsal of key communication skills.

“...In general the on-line experience is helping me as a therapist to become more structured in my feedback, develop my interpersonal skills, develop my IT skills and also particularly this project its helped me get a bit more confident in project planning.”

(Student 5 interview)

### *Navigating the politics of practice*

Students developed a perception of their potential to effect change as occupational therapists and as political agents.

“in OT we need to be fully aware of all of that and constantly trying to take steps forward to address political injustice where we see it, because if we don't there's only so much we can do for somebody's occupational performance “ (Student 5 interview)

Most students developed a more critical and questioning position from which to challenge the status quo:

“I think that we have to be more – um challenging, more politically aware in order to drive change, really,... About it being really our own personal responsibility as practitioners to be aware of the political nature of our work...” (Student 6 interview)

In one of her activities student 6 also acknowledged the importance of facilitating change in wider society.

“I need to really be able to give them the power and the skill and whatever they need to feel empowered for them to continue on, and that is of course a domino effect, and you affect so many others in the process. And that's when you can actually have political change, and invoke political change.”

Students reported more confidence in justifying practice to service users and stakeholders through learning a new political language of occupational justice and applying political reasoning tools:

“And as well the importance of occupational justice which is important so that individuals will thrive and they're not discriminated against so I've got an awareness of

– sort of – the literature and reasoning behind it which would sort of enable my case... sort of... to be put forward and hopefully achieve a positive outcome” (Student 4 interview)

Student 5 intended to teach colleagues to facilitate change in future to support the implementation of her project:

“if the colleagues that I work with aren’t familiar with this notion of occupational justice and occupational therapists as political beings that that might be something I can bring to the team...”

Students also recognised the relationship between their different personal, professional and political positions in practice.

“it put a framework around things, the personal, the professional and the political, just knowing where you are, being aware of your own position was quite useful for me” (Student 6 interview)

“...it was a rather personal module because it was a lot about personal reflection not only as a professional but also as a person, so to reflect and think about sources of meaning we had this topic – issue – meaning – meaningful occupation and what is meaning, and it – I questioned my own sources of meaning and it sounds a bit ridiculous but to discover again that there are also other sources of meaning than only work!” (Student 3 interview)

*What online processes helped and hindered changes?*

*Interacting with online resources*

Students appreciated the variety of resources which were related to practice e.g. online texts, Youtube videos, narrated Powerpoint presentations. They reported that these encouraged them in seeing the bigger picture. They also enjoyed asynchronous and synchronous tools such as Blackboard Collaborate for support and to develop ideas. However, some students

reported a preference for resources which were more visual and interactive rather than text based.

“...having a presentation helped more than reading a paragraph. I wish that there had been more of that but certainly having a variety of activities is really important” (Student 6 interview)

Although students valued structured reading about new concepts, in the absence of meaningful interaction with these, some found it overwhelming.

“To be honest I found it quite overwhelming to begin with, there was a lot of information if I remember, and I remember thinking oh my gosh I’ve got to read all this stuff and I can’t get through it all and its terms that I’m trying to familiarise myself with” (Student 5 interview)

While SW reflected that too much challenging reading might be alienating for some students, NP was enthusiastically sharing resources that he was being introduced to and discussing through his contemporaneous academic work.

### *Creating a safe and supportive environment*

To encourage Access and Motivation, students and tutors shared hopes, fears and expectations before the start of the module. Students were excited about a new kind of learning, hoped to develop new skills and shared anxieties about workload and project management. Interestingly SW reflected that she had not shared any anxieties.

To develop Online Socialisation online identities were quickly established through sharing personal and professional information e.g. as the module required project management skills, students and tutors shared a single powerpoint slide visual representation

of a personal project they had managed in their everyday lives. By exploring personal everyday projects the tutors aimed to model how personal aspect of occupation relate to the social and political, for example, in this case, by sharing information to build a sense of community in a virtual space.

Tutors used a variety of interactions to create a safe and supportive environment such as welcoming individuals when they arrived online; sharing personal details (SW reflected that she shared more personal information than in face to face sessions); responding promptly to posts in the discussion board and acknowledging students' anxieties e.g concerning technical glitches or workload. Students interactions were consistently high throughout with the same number of postings sustained across the three e-tivities. Interactions between students demonstrated strong cohesion as they shared and valued others support in the absence of physical contact.

“...that’s always helpful isn’t it, that people are having the same feelings as you and there’s the same confusion going on or whatever, especially as a distance learner, that’s more important for us as we don’t have that face to face contact, so as a distance learner for me it’s really important, and I really valued – my cohort, I think, was particularly supportive” (Student 6 interview)

In the final module evaluation most students expressed a desire to continue to meet virtually as a group and expressed sadness at the end of the module.

#### *Valuing and sharing diverse experiences*

Students’ experiences of their individual projects were shared in synchronous and asynchronous activities.

“hearing other people’s ideas that’s also part of learning isn’t it? So hearing what other people are doing and the other ways that they’re approaching something. And people cut

different snippets of - of information or point you to tools that they're using, so that's really important in terms of peers" (Student 6 interview)

Students valued opportunities to learn about diverse experiences in international contexts of practice which inspired thinking outside the box.

"I mean I met so many people and I found out how OT is - what OTs are doing across Europe and Africa and the world" (Student 3 interview)

"..and again it reminded me and helped teach me what OT is again... and I think I really benefited from the knowledge of what other people are doing and it inspired me to think outside the box, because when I looked at what they are doing in these countries that are suffering and in Africa and so many things that you could do, but I'd been doing so much of medical model OT that I forgot what that was like" (Student 2 interview)

Tutors also shared their experiences to model participation and mutual respect in a non-hierarchical environment. NP reflected how his participation was more authentic as

"it's not the same experience as that of teaching your own stuff that you have worked out with your colleague. So the discussions often went off piste a bit as we talked about how things worked tacitly, for real." (Reflective diary)

### *Integrated learning and assessment*

All students valued the structure of the virtual learning environment, ease of navigation and integration of learning which was designed to enable the progressive development of knowledge.

"I found having things broken down into small sections made it more manageable to sort of do the homework and look around and resource various reading so I thought that was a really good sort of way that the information was sort of presented " (Student 4 on line)

"the activities I think were very important in helping to shape the project to the end. And it helped that I wasn't left last minute with everything to do from the beginning - I'd



actually worked on it with the e-tivities throughout and those e-tivities helped me formulate my final assignment “(Student 2 interview)

### *Critical self and peer review*

Tutors and students provided timely peer review and feedback on e-tivities in online discussion boards. Tutors modelled asking critical questions of students in synchronous Collaborate sessions and in on line discussion to develop and support ideas, and encourage students’ critical reflection.

A synchronous activity using Blackboard Collaborates which asked students to present a single Powerpoint page on which to reflect on opportunities and challenges of their projects was also cited by most students as valuable:

“all the activities were extremely helpful because it forced me to be very reflective and really think about my clients, whether a specific one or the group and how I can think outside the box for them and the activities helped to kind of break it down, analyse it better, so I could see it better, especially that power point page helped me - it was very visual for me - and it helped me look at it.” (Student 2 interview)

Critical feedback from peers also helped shape projects. Responding to student 2’s desire to step back from autocratic leadership, student 6 asked her to reflect on strength and weaknesses of service user led groups which ultimately prompted a less ambitious approach.

“I liked the part whereby we got to autocritique or question one another’s project or what we were doing” (Student 1 interview)

“I personally learned very much from feedback from people and I can be someone who thinks, you know, I’ve got this idea solidly in my mind and then someone will throw a curved ball and ask a question that I hadn’t even considered.” (Student 5 interview)

*Discussion:*

*Opening up a wider world through online learning.*

This international online learning community allowed exposure to a wide range of experiences about community practice in diverse social, political and economic contexts. Students constructed new knowledge for their own practice as they began to focus on the ‘bigger picture’ of social, economic and political factors, which affect individuals' agencies (Whalley Hammell and Iwama 2012). Consequently, some students began to reconsider social participation as an individual outcome. Instead they developed community-based solutions to overcome social barriers experienced by people living with disabilities (Piskur 2013).

Students not only shared experiences but also acknowledged and valued each others expertise. They practised and rehearsed key communication skills with their peers and tutors which they could implement in their local areas. As they gained confidence in using a language of occupational justice to justify their practice (Townsend 1993), some began to question and challenge the status quo position of service users and their relationships with professionals and other agencies using key skills of networking, advocacy, strategic development and debating (Pollard and Voices Talk, Hands Write 2008).

By sharing personal information to build a sense of community in a virtual space, students became more at ease in exploring the margins of their own personal, professional and political positions (Lather 1991, Walsh 2016). As they navigated the possibilities and

limitations of their projects they adapted their goals and recognised the responsibility of being a political agent of change. For several students this subsequently had an effect on how they saw their jobs and practice. There were similarities with Aldrich's (2015) study where the pedagogical approach of learning from experience allowed students to reconnect with occupational therapy's core philosophical roots, and moved them towards fulfilling the profession's current focus on producing change agents who seek justice (Frank, Baum and Law 2010). Aldrich (2015) aimed to expand cultural competence using community outings and synchronous discussions between US and Swedish students. In our evaluation, sustained involvement in a personally designed community project and participation in a diverse international online learning community allowed for deeper transformative learning and exploration of different positions in practice. In NP's experience of developing on line international exchanges between education programmes, logistical factors (time zones, curriculum patterns, language, establishing a culture of reciprocal engagement) have been challenging. Working in one programme has allowed a richer experience. Online learning may be a way of opening up student environments to a wider world (Farber 2013) where they can work towards social justice from the position of global citizens rather than members of wealthy societies (Thibeault 2006).

### *Mirroring political practice in online learning*

As well as opportunities to learn from each other in a diverse learning community, the online learning approach mirrored the desired learning outcomes of political competence (Salmon and Wright 2014). It is the *shaping* of learning experiences (rather than the content) which influences the kind of people students become (Hooper 2006) and this learning community was shaped by democratic values where exchange of diverse experiences was supported within a non-hierarchical safe and inclusive environment. In the absence of usual social cues,

the module design incorporated more visual and creative media to engage students with different learning styles (Farber 2013). The non-linear approach allowed students to safely express their views and to reflect on their responses (Probst et al. 2009). Tutors promoted and modelled desired online behaviour such as safe self-disclosure to promote social presences and a sense of belonging (Peacock and Gowan 2017) and emotional support through empathy (Farber 2013). Although Ozturk and Hodgson (2017) describe the potential for conflict in online groups which can make the experience feel unsafe, this evaluation presents a model of collaborative learning where democratic values of mutual respect and concern were privileged over consensus decision-making in group assessment.

An important pre-requisite for building active participation in online learning is the constructive alignment of assessment with teaching rather than assessment as a ‘bolt on’ as the majority of distance learners are time-poor and trying to fit their studies in alongside work and personal commitments (Arnold 2015, Rogerson-Revell 2015). In a study of post-graduate occupational therapists Simons et al. (2002) reported benefits of structured activities to force students to do their work when they lacked the self-discipline to do it without help. However this evaluation agreed with Richardson (2004) that students who join distance learning Masters course are generally self-motivated, self-directed and organised. Students in this evaluation did not lack self-discipline but valued activities which were relevant and helped to fulfil the demands of the final assessment (Salmon 2013). Further they felt that their needs were respected and their efforts meaningful to the success of their projects and those of their peers.

Although tutors intended to create a learning environment which mirrored the desired principles of political practice, achieving the right balance of structure and autonomy to

promote students' own construction of knowledge was challenging. To support more critical reflection, tutors used open questions to develop ideas and explore more controversial views (Salmon 2003). Tutors reflected that their detailed formative feedback on each e-tivity may have been too prescriptive at times, possibly deterring students from being in control of their own learning and developing forms of knowledge.

As some students described being overwhelmed with recommended reading material which had mostly been used in the face-to-face version of the module, the choice and amount of reading may need to be carefully managed. Salmon and Wright (2014) discuss the importance of starting from scratch when designing modules previously delivered face to face as the team may become "wedded, making change in process more difficult for academics to accept." (p56)

Although Salmon's 5-Stage Model was used, tutors were aware that not one size fits all (Moule 2007). Reflexivity and flexibility are important skills in community-based practice and tutors demonstrated these as they responded to the group's needs. As students were well established as a group less time was spent at the Access and motivation stage. Further, the 5 stages of the model were not always rigidly applied in a linear manner. Wright (2015) compares Salmon's model to the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison and Anderson 2003) where learning occurs at the intersection of Social, Cognitive and Teaching presences. Although there is some alignment between these models this more dynamic approach reflected the ongoing interaction of social and cognitive presences which enabled students to construct new knowledge. Although peer interactions through dialogue have been criticised for not being sufficiently scholarly (Arnold 2015) in this evaluation students and tutors

critically engaged each other in the VLE and, as in Richardson's study (2004), critical friendships also flourished outside.

### *Limitations*

The short duration of this on-line module can only produce some experience of implementing change, and this was why most of the projects remained ideas rather than being put into practice. University regulations which impose restrictive time constraints and prescriptive learning and assessment outcomes may constrain the possibility of participating in transformative practice for students. There is a risk that short term projects may be unsustainable and lead to unrealistic impressions of change.

Generally this module has had an optimum group size of 10-12 enabling the tutors to interact with students as peers. Safe self-disclosure, as modelled by tutors may not have been possible or desirable in other settings or have reciprocal learning benefits for tutors. Salmon and Wright (2014) stress the importance of changing the beliefs of tutors rather than merely developing skills to transform strategies away from face-to-face learning. NP's reflections on this experience of small online groupwork demonstrated a shift in his own beliefs about the effectiveness of online learning.

Despite the aim of online learning to promote globalisation, the real attraction to universities have been the financial benefits of enrolling large quantities of students

(Islam, Beer and Slack 2015). Although small in scale this evaluation has provided useful findings concerning the experiences of an online learning community from tutor and student perspectives. It benefitted from a high tutor-student ratio which may not be cost effective but which may have positively affected student engagement.

### *Conclusion*

This evaluation demonstrates the potential of online learning to extend learning opportunities for developing professional knowledge and behaviours in the politics of community-based practice and makes an important contribution to occupational therapy practice for the future. Students engaged in self-directed real-world community projects facilitated through engagement in structured activities. They critically reflected on their own and others projects and began to expose assumed political practices and power relations and began to challenge the status quo. As online learning has the potential for thoughtful and timely reflection, students were able to rehearse important skills such as asking questions, giving feedback and critical discussion which are vital in negotiating for change. As well as promoted desired professional behaviours for occupational therapists working in areas of new practice for marginalised groups, the social affordances of democratic online communities can mirror those desired behaviours making online learning potentially a more relevant approach than face to face learning.

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