

Editorial: Social work and social media: best friends or natural enemies?

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In the contemporary connected world the news media appears captivated by stories of ‘trolling,’ ‘sexting’ and other seemingly transgressive behaviours on social media, raising public concerns about ethical behaviour, privacy and particularly the safety of young people online. This generic anxiety produces particular issues for the social work profession, with its traditional emphasis on boundaries and confidentiality around often sensitive information. Guidance from professional regulators and other advisory bodies often struggles to respond to the pace of change and cannot fully embrace the complexity of the ‘context collapse’ provoked by social networking (Wesch, 2008). Similarly, significant literature on social networking concentrates on the potentially negative social implications (Turkle, 2011) thereby furthering the generic anxiety around the subject.

This anxiety is not however, a uniquely contemporary concern. Bartlett (2015) describes Socrates’ apprehensions about the deleterious effects that the creation of writing may have on young people, whilst the development of both the radio and the printing press were also greeted with fears that they would overwhelm people with information and contaminate their minds. In Victorian times too, the notorious ‘Penny Dreadful’ weekly news sheets were attributed with a decline in the moral values and behaviour of young people, leading to concomitant societal breakdown (Anglo, 1977).

This Special Edition represents a response to much of the anxiety and despondency which surrounds the subject of social media in social work. At a recent Annual Board meeting in March 2016, the discussion rapidly turned to the challenges of social media and the creation of sites that threaten to kill or harm social workers, as well as the need to protect service users from harm. However, a Board member from Nepal also cited the ways in which social networking considerably aided the international responses to the recent disasters in his country and you can see him describe this in our online editorial . As Guest Editors we do not seek to minimise the significant and ongoing challenges created by online networking but we do wish to celebrate the ways in which this is being adopted in positive ways as a tool for change within social work education and practice. All of the Special Edition Editors have personal experiences of building and joining positive online communities in both our personal and professional lives. Denise Turner has written about her experience of running an online Twitter chat which sustained her during the final stretch of her PhD thesis (Turner, 2014). This experience is mirrored in the development of a multitude of relevant, diverse and international online communities, from @SocialWorkbookgroup to @SocialCareCurry.

Claudia Megele is an authority in the world of social media where her work spans theorisation and practical application. She has written widely on the topic and developed the ENABLE model for incorporating social media into academic curricula (Megele, 2014) She has created global communities including @MHChat and @SWSCmedia. She was voted one of the top 50 most influential higher education professionals using social media in 2015.

Gerry Bennison is a keen advocate of User involvement in Health and Social Care research and practice and a prolific use of the online platform ‘Twitter.’

Lee Ann Fenge writes blog posts and uses Twitter as part of her work at the National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work. She also has an interest in participatory research and in the ways in which film and social media can be used as a tool to create impact.

Far from isolating or even harming people as much of the literature suggests (Turkle, 2011) these communities dissolve boundaries positively, allowing real time online conversations

between otherwise separate parties in ways which address mutual interests whilst also deconstructing traditional power bases and accompanying inequalities. As such, these emerging social media communities are able to reach to the heart of many of the social justice issues which also lie at the core of social work practice and education.

This Special Edition arose out of our own personal and professional experiences of social media and our discussions throughout have taken place online. We are excited by the international and diverse nature of the contributions which we believe represent the creative and community potential offered by social networking. Whilst the subjects are varied, ranging from designing a mobile app to working within HIV prevention, all of the articles within this Special Edition have at their heart a commitment to ethical education and practice which promotes the core values of the social work profession and recognises both the challenges and the opportunities that social media raises for these.

The first paper, **Creating a mobile app to teach ethical social media practice: Lessons from the theoretical and technical design process and use with international students** describes in detail how the author devised and created a bespoke app with significant practical use for both social work education and practice. This was a pioneering development in the field and demonstrates both the international possibilities of social media within social work, as well as a bringing a welcome reminder that social work can embrace creative potential - an antidote to the creeping bureaucratization which has stymied the profession within recent years.

The second paper, **International Collaborations Using Social media** builds on many of the themes involved in the earlier paper. The authors describe an international education project whereby students were involved in exploring ethical challenges via closed Facebook groups. The creative possibilities for social work education and practice are again explored through the innovative delivery of the project which incorporated a smart phone app and online video scenario. Similarly, the projects international design celebrates the connective potential of social media within social work education and practice.

The third paper, **The application of social media in social work community practice** draws from themes in the earlier two papers but focusses these on a particular case study where social networking was utilized as part of an advocacy campaign. The paper has a strong social justice theme and supports the earlier two papers in utilizing social media as a medium for returning social work to many of its core values.

In the next article, **Social work and social media in Aotearoa New Zealand: Educating social workers across shifting boundaries of social work identity**, the authors retain the emphasis on ethical issues and social justice explored in the earlier papers, but shift the focus slightly to excavate the relationship between the traditional news media and social media. The article specifically investigates professional social workers use of social media, adding a valuable contribution to often impassioned debates in this area.

Switching the direction once more, the fifth article, **Making Social Work 'Appier: The process of developing information based Apps for social work education and practice**, provides a practical synopsis for social work educators interested in designing and developing their own mobile Apps. The authors describe their own experience of creating Apps and share the results of this. The paper is a highly valuable resource for those involved with social work practice and education in the contemporary environment.

In the next paper, **Intersections Between Technology, Engaged Learning and Social Work Capital in Social Work Education**, the authors continue with many of the themes already introduced but filter these through a discussion of social capital amongst University and College students. Specifically, the article explores social media and technology as a means of advancing learning beyond the traditional institutionally based methods and of promoting social equality.

Professional rather than student wellbeing forms the focus of the next paper **Using Facebook as a Tool for Informal Peer Support: A Case Example**. The paper discusses the disturbing issue of stress and burnout in social work practice and drawing on a specific case example, advocates for the use of a closed Facebook group as a means of countering this and providing professional support and collegiality.

A topic often marginalized within the more prevalent debates on social networking is the digital exclusion of those who do not have access to the internet and as Editors we are aware that this is not well represented within this Special Edition. However, the paper **Social media and HIV/Aids: Implications for Social Work Education**, addresses the topic of hard to reach groups and the necessity of bridging the digital divide via a specific example of HIV and Aids prevention. Many of the potential implications of different online platforms in reaching out to less accessible groups are also discussed and conclusions drawn.

Reaching out to and collaborating with harder to reach groups also forms the basis of the paper, **Social media and Young people's involvement in Social Work Education**, which presents findings from research conducted collaboratively with young people as a way of promoting ownership and individual voice within social work education. The research found that social media was successful as a means of involving young people within social work education, thereby countering those arguments which view social media as simply isolating them (Turkle, 2011).

The final paper in this Special Edition, **Deploying Virtual Communities of Practice as a Digital Tool in Social Work: A Rapid Review and Critique of the Literature** offers an overview of the ways in which social media and technology can build and enhance virtual communities of practice within the social work profession. The paper advocates for the development of virtual communities of practice within social work related institutions in order to help share knowledge and build cooperation. The paper serves as an appropriate final contribution to this Special Edition which advocates strongly for creativity, collegiality and innovation in the use of social media within social work education and practice.

With the launch of this Special Edition the journal would like to invite interest in a Special Interest Group to consist of those interested in carrying forward innovative use of social media in social work practice, research and education. Anyone interested should contact either Denise Turner at D.M.Turner@sussex.ac.uk or Lee-AnnFenge at LFenge@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Preparing this Special Edition has been laborious but a real privilege and we want to thank everyone who contributed their papers and who have borne with us throughout the lengthy process. We have been fortunate in creating both an online Book Review and another for the hard copy of the journal and we want to thank Graham Simpson, Tarsem Singh Cooner and

Amanda Taylor for their contributions to these. Additionally we would like to thank all the UK Board members who helped us to make the film for our online editorial and to Amy Turner for her patience and editing skills.

We hope that this Special issue will contribute towards the emerging debates around social media, digital technology and social work practice and education in ways which enhance the possibilities, whilst also remaining mindful of the challenges. Thank you to all the contributors and to those who will carry the debates forwards.

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