



Monash University Unit Innovations Grant Scheme
Joce Nuttall, Faculty of Education
Marg O'Connell, formerly of CeLTS

The virtual practicum: Online supervision of fieldwork in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies, Singapore

Background

- **The BECSt Singapore is an eighteen-month course, open to Singapore-qualified pre-school teachers**
- **A small number of students receive conditional entry, because they do not have a prior qualification and two years experience in a preschool setting**
- **All units, except Field Experience 1 and 2, are taught face-to-face**

Our challenge

- **The problem:**
 - How do you supervise student teachers' fieldwork placement without visiting them on site?
 - How do students provide a sequential record of evidence of the development of their professional identity?
- **The solution:**
 - A Unit Innovations Grant

What is a weblog?

- **Chronological entries**
- **Five features that make a blog;**
 - Personal editorship
 - Hyperlinked posting structure
 - Frequent updates
 - Free public access via Net
 - Archived postings
 - *References to other blogs, sites, links, etc

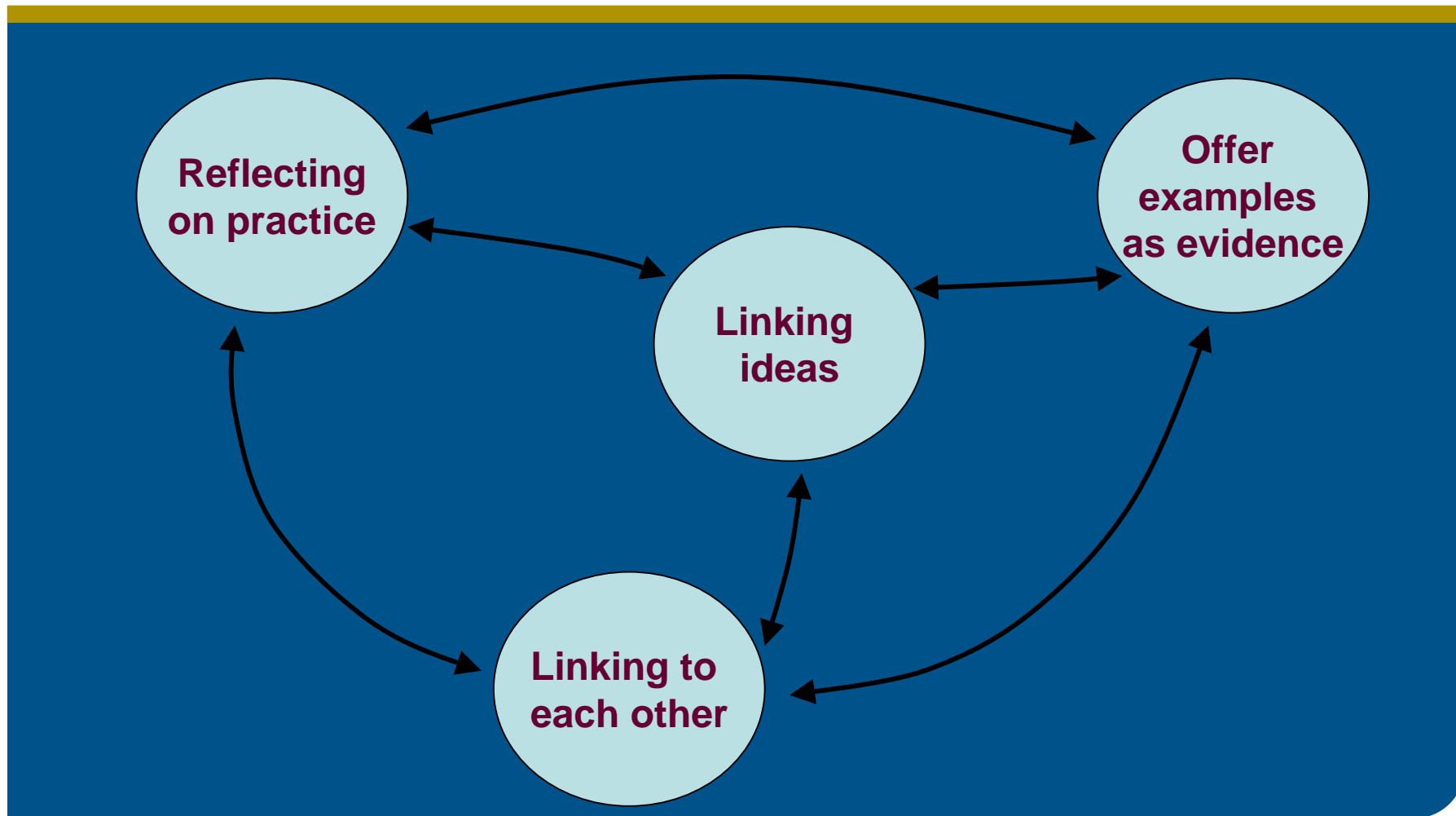
Weblogs as a sociocultural context

- **Allows for a community of inquiry consisting of three key elements**
 - Cognitive presence (construct meaning)
 - Social presence ('real' people)
 - Teacher presence (facilitate outcomes)
- **Allows knowledge to be constructed rather than transmitted**

Student weblog tasks

- **Based on their fieldwork activities, students were responsible for:**
 - Posting responses to log tasks
 - Commenting on posts
 - Uploading files
 - Posting reflections
 - Uploading assignments
 - Uploading practicum assessment paperwork

Linking objectives in context



Learning Corner : Animal Clinic / Hospital



Listening to
heartbeat.



Using the torch
to shine into the
snake's mouth to
check for sore
throat.

Giving the
animals an
injection.



Learning Corner : Animal Clinic / Hospital



This child (above) put the syringe into the other child's mouth. Teacher has to be quick to step in to remind them that it is dirty. I told them that if you used it on another person or animals, you can't use it again. Also it is just a pretend play only. I realised after the session that I should take the opportunity to further explain to the children why they can't use the same syringe again and also about sterilisation of the equipment.



Calling the ambulance

After playing with the animals for a while, the children started using the doctor's set on themselves and friends.



This child is taking her own temperature.

Learning Corner : Animal Clinic / Hospital



Re-reading the storybook again. The attractive and life-like pictures in the book attracted the children.

Sharing experiences in a group promotes social and communication skills.



Benefits of weblogging

- **Ease of access to student contributions,**
- **Mix of formal posts and informal conversation,**
- **Sequential (rather than linear) nature of posts,**
- **Iterative nature of comments and reflections,**

Benefits of weblogging

- **Being able to view weblogs together or separately, according to purpose**
 - the ‘river of news’
- **The high quality of student contributions,**
- **The private/group/public levels of access (controlled serendipity), and**
- **The opportunity to represent oneself as a colleague**

Some things to think about...

- Incorporating the perspective of the supervising teacher,
- Cultural limitations and possibilities,
- Limitations and possibilities (in theory and in practice) in issues of ethics, privacy, and representation,
- Getting more familiar with weblogs as a discursive form; what else is possible?

Some things to think about...

- Theorising aspects of fieldwork: ownership, representation, subversion, aggregation...,
- Blogging as an authentic, reflective space versus/and blogging as a dialogic teaching tool,
- Sociocultural possibilities of reflecting in groups,
- Being realistic about the assessment-driven nature of what we do, and
- Possibilities for other fieldwork units, including portfolio composition.

Student evaluations

- **What was the best thing about the use of weblogging in this unit?**

“I think it would be the sharing of information and the ‘history’ logs at a glance. If we used emailing, I would consider it a tedious process to look through all the email correspondence. I commend the staff for using such an innovative way and I’m honoured to be the pioneer in using it.”

Some useful weblog references

- Bartlett-Bragg, A. 2003, Blogging to learn, *Knowledge Tree Edition 4*. See http://www.flexiblelearning.net.au/knowledgetree/edition04/pdf/Blogging_to_Learn.pdf
- Farmer, J. 2005, Centred communication, paper presented at *Blogtalk Downunder*, May 19-22, Sydney NSW. See http://incsub.org/blogtalk/?page_id=54
- Farmer, J. 2004, Communication dynamics, paper presented at ASCILITE Dec 5-8, Perth WA. See <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/farmer.html>
- <http://www.blogger.com> (for your first blog!)