



# Plagiarism, 'controlled conditions' and the assessment of social work skills in 'real time'

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17/04/2008

## Course details

**Course title** Assessment, Planning, Intervention and evaluation

**Level** UG & PG

**Year** 2, 3

**Module title** *Assessment, Planning, Intervention and Evaluation 2006*

**Discipline/Subject areas** Social work

## Activity details

### What I did

Assessment of social work students

### Why I did it

Concerns about the increased opportunities for plagiarism which have accompanied widespread access to the internet are common across a range of higher education courses (Park 2003).

This is particularly so in relation to courses of professional education where honesty and truthfulness are enshrined in the professions' codes of practice (GSCC 2002, Kenny 2007). As social work educators, we are required to assess 'fitness to practice' and to inform the General Social Care Council of incidents where students are found guilty of significant plagiarism.

One such incident at the University of Sheffield caused us to look closely at our assessment methods and to devise a classroom exercise under 'controlled conditions' in an attempt to ensure that we were assessing students' own work, rather than something that they had found – or bought – on the internet.

### What I wanted to achieve

The aim was to stimulate learning beyond "acquisition of knowledge and skills" towards "changes in behaviour" (Barr et al 2000 cited in Carpenter, 2005) and the development of skills required of emerging social work practitioners.

### **A short description of what I did**

At the beginning of the classroom exercise, which was completed under 'controlled conditions' (see box below), students received 'unfolding events' (events which had just occurred in each of the scenarios) as may meet a practitioner returning to work on a Monday morning. The exercise required students to write about the issues that arose as a result of the unfolding events, prioritise the order in which they would respond to each of these and balance risks and needs.

The skills required for the exercise were modelled in module teaching. Students were supported through other unfolding scenarios and asked to respond to new information as it unfolded, using questions such as:

- How does this change your planning for this family?
- What do you think you need to do at this point?
- What potential difficulties might arise for this family?
- How has the risk assessment for this service user changed?

### **What worked well**

Students were able to take some notes with them that they could refer to and it was not perceived as an exam situation.

The assessment method aided to test social work skills in "real time"

### **Problems and/or issues**

Had to cater for individual students' disability needs It generated a lot of anxiety for students in the beginning

Not sufficient time to complete all tasks.

### **What students thought about it**

Informal feedback from students and practice assessors has indicated that the controlled classroom exercise was a particularly useful way of preparing for practice as students were required to 'think on their feet' and their social work skills were, in effect, assessed in 'real time.'

### **Key messages**

The assessment method has been successfully implemented for last two years and is continually being developed.

### **Related documents or links**

See Controlled Classroom Exercises information sheet for students

### **Any other comments**

We are not viewing the classroom exercise as fixed or static, but rather as an assessment which will change and develop over time. For example, our 2007 exercise required students to consider the needs of both children and adults within family scenarios in which 'unfolding events' had occurred and we are already planning further changes for 2008.

14/05/08/mj