



## Student's Perceptions of "Criticism" and "Critique": The "Yeah But" of Encouraging Collaborative Reflection in a On-Line Discussion Forum

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**PURPOSE:** On-line discussion forums offer undergraduate physiotherapy students the opportunity to collaborate while at a distance from one another on professional practice placements. It was envisaged that sharing critical incidents occurring in practice, on-line, would provide a focus for collaborative critical reflection with the ultimate aim of enhancing both breadth and depth of analyses. **RELEVANCE:** Maximising student learning and subsequent preparation for practice is an on-going challenge for physiotherapy educators and researchers. There is an imperative for physiotherapy practitioners to continuously review and reflect on their practice in a critically analytical way that necessitates the development of critical reflexivity at an early stage in a professional career. Information and communication technology opens up new and innovative approaches that can enrich and enhance learning from experience on placement. **DESCRIPTION:** The initial stage of this action research project involved the creation of six WebCT on-line discussion forums for existing seminar groups of approximately 22 students. The forums were private to the group and an on-line tutor. The seminar groups had been together for the first sixteen months of the programme and were familiar with WebCT and the theory of critical incident analysis prior to their first placement block. **OBSERVATIONS:** Narrative analysis of on-line discussion threads and focus group data generated following completion of the placement block revealed that on the whole students were reticent about challenging one another for fear of their comments being construed as criticism. The dominant discourse was one of support and empathy where students gained unconditional reassurance from peers rather than developing all encompassing analyses of the complexities of practice. **CONCLUSIONS:** Innovations aimed at enhancing cognitive development such as on-line collaboration need to pay attention to affective concerns and can promote affective learning. On-line discussion forums provide an additional means of support during practice placements. However, students must recognise that challenge and critique need not be confrontational, adversarial or threatening, and is fundamental to enhancing not only their own professional practice but also the practice of physiotherapy in general. Longitudinal research would enhance understanding of how critical reflexivity develops in students and qualified practitioners.

