Theme: Diversity and research methods and methodology

Using an e-learning tool to support qualitative e-research in Occupational Therapy

As e-learning tools, e.g. Virtual Learning Environments (VLE), become more sophisticated, researchers in different fields consider them as an option for data collection when conducting research. This paper discusses the potential use of such a tool (WebCT) to support qualitative e-research in occupational therapy (OT). A case study drawn from a PhD in the area of pediatric OT is presented. The specific study employed an e-learning tool to conduct discussions groups during the data collection phase of a mixed methods project. Issues for researchers when moving traditional face-to-face focus groups into online media are considered. The advantages of using a VLE to collect data are discussed. Some of the advantages include the provision of a secure, confidential, safe research environment and, the technical support the researcher might often receive from a relevant team. Issues which could potentially interfere with the use of such a tool, e.g. accessibility, are also discussed.