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Designing a consequentially based study into the online support of pre-service teachers in the UK

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Abstract

This paper reports on the design of a pilot doctoral study into the online support of pre-service teachers. It highlights the significance of a consequential, rather than deontological, perspective in guiding the development of a study's design. The study initially aimed to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions and use of social media on their school placements by setting up groups on Facebook and Twitter. However, several problems occurred in relation to the recruitment of participants. It became increasingly clear that there was significance in the positionality of the researcher as an 'outsider' to the research context and the potential role for gatekeepers in understanding remote research sites. An ethical framework was used to make a more comprehensive analysis of the issues at play which helped identify ways of proceeding. A redesign of

the study followed with a stronger rationale for the way consequential considerations can help address deontological concerns.

Keywords: consequential ethics, deontological ethics, research design, teacher education, technology-enhanced learning

Introduction

Consideration of ethics is an important aspect of all research involving human participants. Ethical issues are usually complex within social science enquiry, such as educational research, and normative expectations are articulated in professional and academic body codes of practice internationally (e.g. AARE, 2014; AERA, 2011; BERA, 2011; ESRC, 2012) as well as espoused within individual University ethical approval procedures. These codes have been revisited and revised to reflect societal changes as they affect ethical considerations and acknowledge new sites for social science research. These sites include those associated with new technologies and the appearance of online environments which offer new challenges to researchers. As well as the reviews by professional associations of their existing codes, the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) was set up to offer guidance about research in online contexts (AoIR, 2012). Additionally academics have reflected on their experiences of working ethically in their online research (eg. Delorme, Zinkhan, & French, 2001; Ess, 2004; James & Busher, 2007; Whiteman, 2010). It is to this body of knowledge that this special issue's collection of papers aims to contribute.

This paper reports the experiences of designing (and re-designing) a doctoral pilot study which involves a research focus on online interaction between pre-service teachers.. The authors, a doctoral student and supervisor, chart the reasons for needing to adapt the original design of the study in the light of a developing ethical

understanding of the implications of studying within the particular research context. This showed an appreciation of what have been termed "situated judgement" (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012a), "local ethics" (Whiteman, 2010, p.7), "one's academic and political environment" (AoIR, 2012, p.3) and/or "cultural sensitivity" (Flinders, 1992, p.113). In this study a balancing between maximising benefits and researcher responsibilities, was required, which is framed in this paper as a tension between consequential and deontological ethical thinking. The ethical learning which accompanied this balancing (and rebalancing) required a fuller appreciation of the research context and the significance of relationship-building.

It was found that ethical appraisal needs to be an iterative process involving various, potentially competing principles. The paper contributes to the call to adopt a "dialogic, case-based, inductive and process approach to ethics" (AoIR, 2012, p.5). In a pragmatic sense this offers a challenge to University ethical procedures which traditionally expect a statement of ethical aims and processes for approval only prior to initial fieldwork. In a principled sense, thinking iteratively about the place of ethics in a study, offers a positive approach to ethical appraisal by advocating an inclusive and continuing negotiation of what is both worthwhile and possible to study.

A researcher's decision-making therefore hinges on working out where the tensions lie and therefore "which compromises are and are not relevant in a given context" Hammersley & Traianou, 2012b, p.135). This requires a reflexivity, which accepts that "no matter what the nature of research, we may find the assumptions we have worked from, decisions we have made, become challenged; they may too be in a process of development" (Whiteman, 2010, p.19). The paper argues that research decisions made on an ethical basis do not only occur prior to the study but are an ongoing and cyclical process (Beach & Eriksson, 2010; AoIR, 2012). An ethical

framework was used to allow flexibility in this study's ongoing appraisal of possible and, in particular, desirable ways of developing a research design. It became increasingly clear that there was significance in the positionality of the researcher as an 'outsider' to the research context as a distance learning doctoral student resident in Greece but planning to study in the UK. The benefits of direct participation in the research site are outlined.

The need for ethical appraisal of study plans

Traditionally in Western traditions of ethical thinking researchers are expected to consider a binary of 'right over wrong' and 'good over bad'. Researchers use for reference frameworks which are believed to be morally founded from which to guide such judgements; frameworks often referred to as normative, such as those based on justice, duty, consequence or virtue (Given, 2008).

One consequence of a binary view of ethics is that it often becomes associated with an absolute view of ethics; such that once guidelines are set they are considered as needing to be followed without deviance (Given, 2008). Tensions and compromises, as indicated above, would therefore not be recognised. Such rules within social science research are aimed at developing trust between researchers and participants and include: veracity; privacy; confidentiality and fidelity (Kent, 2000). However even these rules, Kent concludes, can be challenged as not absolute in practice. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) guidance, starts with a caveat that what is included in their documentation are "not rules and regulations but does represent the tenets of best ethical practice that have served our community of researchers well in the past and will continue to do so in the future" (p.3).

Conversely, relativist approaches (Given, 2008) demand that we show sensitivity to local contexts and norms. Some researchers look to see how visible normative views and practices are within the context of the research site to try to account for the realities of research sites. Rather than unquestioningly accepting that codes of practice be applied as 'certain', such researchers identify tensions and acknowledge choices. This then leads to further questions: Who should decide on the final actions in the event of choices? And, on what basis and how should these decisions be justified? Pring (2002) presents four choices for researchers when faced with what may appear to be irreconcilable principles. The researcher:

1. Does not recognise any dilemma;

2. Declares taking a particular stance e.g. as a consequentialist or a deontologist and makes judgements on this basis;

3. Searches for overarching principles 'in vain';

4. Deliberates between the pros and cons of acting in different ways, in the light of contextual awareness (Pring, 2002, p.119).

The authors subscribe to the fourth option and present how an ethical appraisal framework developed by Stutchbury and Fox (2009) supports such ethical 'deliberations'.

Key ethical principles in tension

The main advantage of using this framework was the way in which it foregrounded thinking consequentially about a study. By this we mean that a study is planned to maximise the benefits of the study by identifying a) who might benefit and b) how this might best be achieved. A multi-level view of potential beneficiaries (Whiteman,

2010) goes beyond the traditional utilitarian approach to ethics, which prioritises actions which maximise benefits only for the "greater good" (Given, 2008, p.5). UK ethical guidance advocates researchers to:

"…promote respect for all those who engage with it:

• researchers and participants;

• academics and professional practitioners;

• commissioning bodies and;

• those who use the research" (BERA, 2011, p.3)

Our interpretation of this was that researchers need to consider multiple aspirations, reflecting on the implications of this for showing beneficence (Kent, 2000; AoIR, 2012). "Beneficence refers to an action done to benefit others" [1](Beauchamp, 2013). We therefore acknowledged multiple beneficiaries and accepted a weighing between multiple rights to the research needed to be set against multiple responsibilities; the latter usually described as deontological concerns (having a duty towards those involved with the research). These concerns are implicit in interpreting professional codes of practice, placing a set of expectations on the actions of researchers (James & Busher, 2007).

Whilst beneficence is consequentially-related, autonomy is usually considered a deontologically-derived principle. To allow those involved with the research to be autonomous is to allow them to decide for themselves, rather than be externally

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[1] Beneficence is distinct from '*benevolence* (which) refers to the morally valuable character trait—or virtue—of being disposed to act to benefit others' (Beauchamp, 2013).

imposed upon (Christman, 2011). This is bound up in the normative guidance of codes of practice to gain participants' (and gatekeepers') informed consent. When a dilemma arises between autonomy and beneficence the norm within social science research is usually to prioritise the right of individuals to self-determination, i.e. to respect their autonomy (Kent, 2000). Our growing concern, however, was that if there are multiple beneficiaries, whose autonomy is to be prioritised?

Two further key deontologically-based principles are the notions of non-maleficence (avoidance of harm) and of justice (Kent, 2000). The first principle involves researchers in consciously considering any potential harm a study might inflict on individuals. The second principle is associated with feminist and critical traditions of ethical thinking (eg. Gilligan, 1992; Rawls, 1999). Not being equable to all parties has been seen as the key flaw to consequentialist thinking when adopting a utilitarian approach and prioritising the 'greater good' (Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). Hammersley and Traianou's analysis of the BERA guidance (2012a), advocates that the rights of the most vulnerable should be particularly considered.

It is often attempts to protect the most vulnerable, that sparks a researcher to involve 'gatekeepers' (Blodgett, Boyer & Turk, 2005; Homan, 2002; Sixsmith, Boneham & Goldring, 2003). As was relevant to the study gatekeepers were indeed important to giving an outside researcher access to a research site even when they were not giving permission to participate on behalf of others (Homan, 2002). However, as will be shown, their full significance was not realised from the outset.

A framework for comprehensive ethical appraisal

The framework used (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009) was based on the work of the philosopher David Seedhouse working in a healthcare context, and the educationalist David Flinders. Seedhouse (1998) designed a grid, incorporating four major strands of Western ethical theorising, arguing that repeated use of the grid would lead the researcher to greater ethical awareness. Stutchbury and Fox (2009) noted, as shown in Table 1, that the four strands Seedhouse identified mapped well on to Flinders' four stances for ethical thinking in educational research (Flinders, 1992). Flinders, however, proposed these as alternative positions rather than to be considered together.

Insert Table 1

Flinders proposed that consequential and deontological positions were least appropriate to qualitative social science research as they placed in danger the most vulnerable and least heard participants. Dennis's review of published literature concerning research participants' experiences of research revealed an over-emphasis of such cost-benefit analyses, noting that participants were little consulted to verify assumptions being made (Dennis, 2012). This matches warnings that adopting the utilitarian principle simplistically uses participants as a means to an end whilst trying to benefit the wider community (Bridges, 2002). These caveats on misapplication of traditional consequential and deontological stances support authors (e.g. Flinders, 1992; Beach & Eriksson, 2010; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009) who advocate that ecological and relational perspectives on ethical thinking, need to be considered alongside.

Stutchbury and Fox (2009) advocate that all four aspects (Table 1) are needed to identify key issues and tensions by generating a set of questions, proposed as suggestions, which can be used to interrogate a particular research situation.

This paper charts one such learning journey in the light of a doctoral study undertaken by a researcher residing in Greece wishing to study the role of social media in the UK educational context of initial teacher education. The initial study plan was to recruit participants through technology. However, as will be shown, the positionality of the researcher and the particularities of both the teacher education and online contexts were relevant to the ethical issues which arose.

The aims of the doctoral study

The aim of this study was to explore pre-service teachers' perceptions and use of social media on their school placements. The school placement period is a key component of teacher education courses (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Davie & Berlach, 2010; Mayer, 2002; Ong'ondo & Jwan, 2009; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Wilson, 2006), as it can provide student teachers with professional experiences (Haigh & Ward, 2004) and "a supported entry to the profession" (Ulvik & Smith, 2011).

However, the school placement has often been characterized as a particularly stressful period. Stress experienced by pre-service teachers undertaking school placements has been discussed in the literature (e.g. Chaplain 2008; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999). Another problem often associated with school placements is isolation (Bodzin, 2000; Hramiak, 2010; Le Cornu & White, 2000; Mayer, 2002), as pre-service teachers are placed in schools away from their university peers and tutors.

Studies have examined the use of different technologies to create online communities to support pre-service teachers in different countries (Brooke, 2012; Davie & Berlach, 2010; English & Duncan-Howell, 2008; Hramiak, 2010; McLoughlin, Brady, Lee, & Russel, 2007; Wright, 2010). The study reported in this paper focused on the role of social media in teacher education school placement support in the UK. Social media

allow users to interact, participate in communities, as well as generate, mix, share and comment on content (Conole, 2013) which, it was assumed, would help pre-service teachers overcome potential isolation and stress associated with school placements.

Developing an initial research design

The overarching question of the study was: *How do pre-service teachers use social media tools to interact with each other while on school placement*?

A multiple case study approach was chosen focusing on the 'cases' of two student groups from Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses in one UK University. The students were studying to become secondary school teachers on a one-year full-time course consisting of two significant school placements. One group of students was invited to join a closed Facebook group, while the second group was invited to use Twitter. Data was planned for three points: prior, during and after school placements. The data collection methods would include a survey, participants' online interactions on social media and an interview respectively.

The researcher planned to take the role of a non-participant observer. It was this judgment that exposed the researcher to the first ethical issue i.e. thinking how to show respect to the participants by allowing them autonomy whilst protecting them from harm. In recognising the importance of deontologically-based principles based on building trust by; telling the truth, ensuring privacy, offering confidentiality and keeping promises (Kent, 2000), the researcher chose to be explicit, aiming to gain informed consent from potential participants as they were recruited.

The researcher chose an explicit approach, trying to anticipate any possibilities for harm, by making clear to participants the extent to which the 'spaces' could be

considered 'safe'. Whilst it was possible to set up a closed Facebook group, Twitter would need to be an open space, where interactions would be potentially public. However it was explained that the hashtag[2] chosen would not be shared with non-participants. An invitational email was designed to inform participants about the three stages of the research (survey, participation in the group and the interview). In addition, a YouTube video was created to introduce the researcher to the potential participants and convey in more detail the intentions of the study. The link to the video was included in the email

To maximise the chances of a viable group for both tools, it was decided that groups would be pre-allocated to one tool or the other. Moreover, six participants for each social media tool were considered a minimum. On the above basis, the researcher was granted approval from the University Ethics Approval Committee.

Early challenges

After approval, two problems quickly emerged: The most important of these was in recruiting participants but, related to this, was the issue of accessing participants as an outsider researcher in the particular research context.

In terms of recruitment, the researcher contacted gatekeepers from different Universities. The gatekeepers that replied explained that it would be difficult to obtain permission from their University Ethics Committee to contact their students.. However, one University replied positively. An invitational email was sent to different subject classes of PGCE students: only two students volunteered for Twitter. The two participants were students in one PGCE class. No participants for the

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[2] The hashtag (#) symbol which precedes tweets on Twitter.

Facebook group expressed an interest in volunteering. The research started with the Twitter cohort. Participants were sent the link to the online survey. They were then asked to follow the researcher, as well as each other.

A second attempt was made to recruit participants for the Facebook group. The researcher decided to send a different email to more PGCE classes, including those training for Primary school teaching. Participants were informed about the Facebook group and invited to participate in as many aspects of the study as they wished. For example, they could only fill in the questionnaire without having to participate in the Facebook group. Again, no replies were received. At this time the researcher started contemplating the possibility of changing the context of the study from the UK to Greece.

These unexpected results prompted the researcher to reflect on the possible reasons for the low take up and imagined the following reasons:

- Participants were invited to complete a questionnaire, join social media groups and participate in an interview. It was possible that these requests were perceived by participants as making unreasonable demands on their time. However, even when reducing the expectation of full participation, no volunteers were recruited.

- The email which was sent to participants was lengthy which might have been too off-putting or possibly confusing to students. The video was offered to overcome the fact that the researcher was unknown to the students but, even this, did not offer a chance to ask queries directly of the researcher.

- Students may already have had their own groups on social media. Therefore, the study had no real benefit for them.

Initial research design revision

After reflection with supervisors the researcher decided to adapt the design such that it did not require students to join online groups but, instead, reflect on their experiences of their informal use of social media for peer interaction or, if they were not using any, to offer their perceptions of the likely value of social media to them during school placements.

The research questions were revised and this time students were asked to answer an online survey about their uses (or not) of social media during their school placement with an additional invitation contained in the questionnaire to participate in a Skype interview. Two different recruitment methods were used; again through gatekeepers and through social media. In particular, with the permission of the programme leaders, who had been consulted by email about the change of plans, some of the same cohorts were invited to participate in the adapted study. The researcher asked the gatekeepers to forward the link to the survey to their students. The researcher decided to recruit from beyond this single University and uploaded the invitational email/link to the survey on education-related forums and the researcher's personal account on Twitter and Facebook. The researcher had informed their home ethics committee about the change in plan. Despite being advertised for two months, 13 replies to the questionnaire were received: No respondents accepted the invitation to an interview.

In reviewing this second poor recruitment of participants, the researcher decided to make more substantial contact with the PGCE programme leaders and others involved

in teacher education at the original University, to ask for their opinions about the problematic situation. The researcher ran a seminar presenting their plans and challenges to the University's Education department, ensuring that the programme leaders were able to attend. This face-to-face discussion, including the gatekeepers, revealed a couple of important issues:

- PGCE students receive many invitations to research through their emails. . The requests of them, coming 'cold' from someone outside the course, may indeed have seemed not only unnecessary but also unreasonable.

- As also suspected, the programme leaders were aware that students had already formed groups using social media. The researcher concluded that requesting access to participate in any of these groups, especially when the researcher was unknown to the group, was unreasonable.

It had become clear that asking potential participants to join online groups was a more complex proposition than first imagined. Despite the fact that the researcher took steps to ensure privacy, confidentiality and avoiding harm, it became evident that students would not join the online group set up by the researcher, as they had set up and were participating in their own groups. Upon reflection, if this had been known earlier, the requirement to join online groups would not have been included. The discussion with the gatekeepers had made it evident that the researcher's lack of familiarity with the context contributed to explaining the minimal take up. It was at this point that the researcher was introduced to the Stutchbury and Fox's (2009) ethical framework which was used to crystallise the key issues involved.

Re-thinking the study

Under the deontological layer of Stutchbury and Fox's (2009) framework, four categories are identified:

1. The avoidance of harm (non-maleficence),

2. Fairness,

3. Telling the truth (veracity),

4. Keeping promises (fidelity).

In retrospect it became obvious that assumptions about the study had been focused on such considerations; pre-occupied with protection and 'doing the right thing'. These deontological principles had been enacted by being thorough and transparent in the approaches, aiming to achieve as fully-informed consent as seemed possible. The email was lengthy and required potential participants to access a video. This begged the question 'Why would PGCE students be interested enough to engage?' 'How would they consider it beneficial? It seemed likely that they were not and did not - respectively.

Reviewing deontological considerations

Avoidance of harm

The recruitment method involved gatekeepers. It became obvious that; "the … gatekeeping answer is in fact more complex than a simple permissions exercise" (Brindley & Bowker, 2013. p.295). The invitational email was cleared by gatekeepers, who were asked to forward it to their students. Initially they expressed concerns that participating might prove time-consuming for participants. Gatekeepers were assured

that participants would be free to choose how often and how much they would like to participate. The email which was developed followed Kent's (2000, p.64) rule of veracity, defined as; "an obligation to provide accurate information about the nature of the study when enlisting potential participants". The focus of this information was intended to explain how the study would not harm participants and it was assumed that this was sufficiently stated when gatekeepers gave their consent to share the invitation. As well as informing the group using Twitter about the openness of this tool potential participants were advised not to refer to any tutors, mentors, pupils or the name of the school they are placed at.

Privacy and confidentiality were also considered important to recognise (Kent, 2000). This was crucial to the original design featuring the setting up of a closed Facebook group. It should be noted that the researcher had no knowledge at this point of existing groups. As well as describing the open and closed natures of the two tools the limitations were also made clear and advice given. It was accepted that students had ultimate autonomy in their use of social media such that this advice couldn't be obligatory.

For the Twitter group:

- It would be possible that people beyond the group could access participants' tweets;

- Any tweets quoted verbatim in the researcher's academic papers would be possible to find using a simple search engine.

- Participants were encouraged to set up an account other than their personal one.

- The hashtag was not shared with anyone else.

- Only tweets including this hashtag would be used for the study.

For the Facebook group:

- Unlike Twitter, Facebook does not allow users to have more than one account. The creation of a closed group was a conscious decision when creating the original design, aimed at ensuring participants' privacy and confidentiality would be protected even though participants would have to use their existing accounts.

- They would not have to be Facebook friends with the other people of the group to join the community.

- Others would not be accepted to join the group. If the researcher was joining an existing group, it was assumed that gaining permissions from the whole group would be unrealistic. For a pilot study, in which the research methods were being trialled and only a few participants needed, this level of approaching unknown potential participants did not seem desirable. Moreover, even if students agreed to allow the researcher to join their group, the presence of an unknown person in a group for research purposes could possibly have deterred some students from communicating with their peers as they wished. It is possible that they might resort to other ways to communicate, for example through Facebook chat. This would mean that these interactions would not be visible to the researcher. Furthermore, it would disrupt the group's practices, cause harm to the participants and affect the validity of the study. In contrast,

in a group set up by the researcher, the students would have agreed to participate, knowing from the beginning the purpose of the group.

- The researcher would be the administrator.

In both cases, potential participants were informed that the researcher would record and analyse their conversations

Fairness

Since one of the promises to potential participants was anonymity, the researcher had to ensure that both groups would be treated equally. With regard to Facebook, setting up a closed group was straightforward and the above recommendations would help to ensure that participant data would remain confidential. The use of a new account and the hashtag aimed to offer Twitter users equivalent, if not equal, protection.

Telling the truth

As has been shown, fully informing participants prior to their deciding whether to participate or not, was considered important, making sure "the participants fully understand the implications of what the researcher is trying to achieve" (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009, p. 494). However, since potential participants were contacted online, this resulted in a lengthy email. It may be that this detail was counter-productive to recruitment. In addition, there was no chance to ask questions and so participants' voices were not heard, as Dennis (2012) would have advocated. Telling the truth extended to the gatekeepers and may have contributed to why many Universities had showed caution in accepting the study.

Keeping promises

Keeping promises included the promise to gatekeepers that any student participation would not substantially add to their workload. Participants were also promised that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Keeping promises to the few respondents proved problematic. Although it was evident that the study would not collect enough data, the researcher continued with the pilot stage and participants started using Twitter. The researcher had not articulated the aspired minimum number of six participants for each social media tool and therefore the deontological consideration of keeping promises was adhered to. The decision to proceed was also due to the hope that more participants would consent to participate in due course. After the end of the pilot, the researcher sent participants an email thanking participants for completing the survey and participating in the Twitter discussions, informed them that they would be contacted for an interview and 'unfollowed' the participants. We note that, despite being invited to an interview, this was not carried out and we are left unclear as to how participants might have felt about this. However, on balance given the change of direction of the study, it felt important not to further impose further on them. In retrospect, informing potential participants about the minimum number of participants would have been preferable.

Reviewing the study from a consequentialist perspective

The deontological principles were reviewed against the other three aspects of the framework ie.

- external (the use of codes of practice and local, cultural contextual factors),

- relational (a focus on building research relationships) and;

- consequential issues.

Whilst the external and relational dimensions helped clarify the problems with the original requests, it was the latter which offered a way forward. The framework encouraged a consideration of multiple beneficiaries. In particular, it allowed the potential value of the study to be set against what appeared to be the lack of interest as evidenced by poor recruitment. Adopting the broadest possible view of beneficence, different levels of beneficiary needed to be identified. Stutchbury and Fox (2009) list four categories; Benefits for society, benefits for particular groups, benefits for individuals and benefits for the researcher – to be weighed against the avoidance of harm to all such categories.

Benefits for society

Bringing the most benefit to society was deemed important and assumed that the research question was worthwhile. For this value to be realised the researcher was aware the study needed to be robust and substantial. Since the recruitment of participants was not sufficient in either iteration of the study, it was clear the study had to be restructured. Although the initial design would potentially have permitted insight into the pre-service teachers' practices in using social media for support in a UK University context – this had not proved feasible. To re-imagine the study the basic assumptions of the focus (and the research questions) and the research context needed to be challenged.

As the researcher is based in Greece, it was thought that recruitment would be an easier task if the study focused on the Greek context. The researcher had made initial contacts with programme leaders in Greece. It was noted that Greek initial teacher education is through a four year undergraduate course and school placements are

much shorter. This challenged the focus on school placement support to a broader interest in social media support for training pre-service teachers.

Benefits for groups

It was hoped that understanding students' perceptions and practices would provide benefits for three groups:

1. Teacher educator tutors and mentors;

2. Teacher training course developers;

3. Educational researchers.

The study aimed to contribute information about whether social media enhance interaction and the development of a sense of community. It was hoped that, by taking into account pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences, teacher educators would gain insights into how to possibly improve school placements and education programmes.

The face-to-face seminar with teacher educators at the original University challenged assumptions, especially the fact that students had already formed informal social media networks. The key role of gatekeepers and the development of relationships with them led to a greater appreciation of the context. This contact was more than courtesy as it was realised they held vital information about the research site for an outsider researcher (Homan, 2002). This left the researcher in the situation of *either* trying to work with programme leaders to develop a study considered mutually worthwhile, using their full support to build in and promote data collection plans into the programme *or* accept that there were significant limitations to residing in Greece and not being a teacher educator. The researcher concluded that on both fronts there

was too much work to do. This appreciation of the importance of: a) cultural and contextual knowledge – the cultural sensitivity referred to by Flinders (1992) and; b) of planning in beneficence for more of those involved in the research led the researcher to appreciate that a study could be designed of greater benefit in a different context.

Benefits for the individual participants

The question of the benefits for participants became an important issue. The lack of participation may have been due to the fact that the people who were contacted did not see how they could benefit from it. As Whiteman (2010) had predicted a closer reflection on the assumptions driving the study was needed, as reasons for poor recruitment were reviewed. It was appreciated in retrospect that the hypothesis that social media would support pre-service teachers had been drawn principally from an appreciation of published work, many of which was of small-scale, without examining whether students needed or wanted such support.

The Twitter participants used the hashtag in 18 tweets in a period of about one month. Of those 18 tweets, 6 were replies to each other. It is possible that the small number of participants allowed few opportunities for interaction. A redesign of the study was hoped to bring more benefits to future participants.

Benefits for the researcher

The benefits of completing a doctoral study are always multiple (Burgess & Wellington, 2010; Taysum, 2013): Firstly, there is the learning associated with completing an increasingly independent piece of research and a rich appreciation of the research process. (It is to this that the ethical learning charted in this paper is related). Much of the skills and understanding are transferable skills for application

beyond the life of the study itself. Secondly, there is the substantive learning associated with the chosen research focus. Thirdly, there are the benefits of graduating with a doctorate as a 'ticket' into academia. To place the researcher in the position of being able to successfully complete a doctoral study from the false starts charted in this paper it became evident that, unless the study was fundamentally redesigned, there would not be a viable study. As has been outlined this involved reflecting with supervisors on the scope of the researcher's interests and what was now considered a worthwhile research focus – involving revising the research questions, research context and research design.

Implications for research design of balancing consequential and deontological considerations

This paper has showed that, despite a focus on deontological concerns based on academic normative expectations of applying professional codes of practice, enlisting participants was a difficult task. Stutchbury and Fox's framework (2009) helped the researcher reflect on a broader range of ethical thinking and provided a chance to focus on the consequential potential of the study. Thinking of multiple beneficiaries rather than a traditional utilitarian stance of considering only the 'greater good', challenged the initial assumptions about what would be possible or desirable to study.

Moreover, it became evident that other aspects of ethical thinking had not been taken into consideration prior to the initial attempt to recruit participants. For example, more emphasis should have been placed on the external/ecological layer. The lack of familiarity with the context, along with the researcher's studying from a distance, made it difficult to spend time in the field. Also, it became evident that more emphasis should have been placed on relational/individual aspect of the ethical

framework. It seemed that asking potential participants to answer a survey, join an online group and participate in an interview made unnecessary demands on the students' time. Further, the study's aims did not appear to seem worthwhile enough to volunteer for and their suggestions as to a way forward had not been consulted. It was decided that face-to-face recruitment, instead of online, would help build trust between the researcher and potential participants and allow for some negotiation of focus.

Three major changes in the study took place, summarised as follows:

1. The research question was (again) changed to:

How do pre-service teachers in Greece use social media informally to support their academic and professional learning needs?

It was believed that this research question would bring wider benefits - to the community, individual groups, and participants - as in this way greater understanding would be gained about pre-service teachers' personal preferences with regards to interactions though social media. It would also help depict a more natural picture of their current practices with social media.

2. Change in the context

Whilst the focus of the research would still be pre-service teachers, the study would be conducted in Greece, where the researcher resides. Although the doctoral researcher would still be an 'outsider' in some respect, their common language and cultural background brought them closer to this community. In Greece it would be much more practical to recruit training teachers face-to-face. Initial telephone and face-to-face contacts with gatekeepers have already given the researcher an

opportunity to explain the study in detail, asking for their opinions and suggestions. Gatekeepers have made suggestions about the timing of the recruitment and agreed to introduce the researcher to their students who would have the opportunity to ask questions.

3. Change in data collection methods

The data collection methods to address this new research question were chosen to be: an online survey, a participant diary and interviews. It is believed that this suite of methods will impose less demand on participants' time and allow their voices to be heard in a way that will be easier to see how their participation might bring them benefits. A new application for ethical approval from the University is now needed. Further ethical learning is envisaged as to whether the assumptions outlined above are challenged.

Conclusion and implications

This paper reports the design, redesign and re-redesign of a pilot doctoral study originally intended to be based in the UK. Despite the emphasis placed on deontological issues prior to the study, the low take-up of the study prompted the researcher to reflect on other aspects of ethical appraisal. The ethical framework, covering four dimensions to ethical thinking, led to more comprehensive appraisal of the study. The framework gave the researcher prompts to reflect on the consequential aspects of the study, particularly in terms of beneficence, which led to an appreciation of the multiple layers of those associated with the study. This connected with thinking ecologically about the study and foregrounding the importance of cultural (research context) sensitivity and understanding. This also allowed attention to be placed on the

relational aspects, in particular having identified the key role of gatekeepers. Reflections on the above led to a redesign of the study.

A key finding of this study was an acknowledgement of the ethical learning (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009; Whiteman, 2010) resulting from this iterative ethical appraisal of the study. The first aspect of this learning was to recognise that this takes place over time and with a developing understanding of the research context, accepting "the contingent nature of research practice" (Whiteman, 2010, p.6). This relates to a full appreciation of the 'situated' nature of ethic concern (e.g. Calvey, 2008; White & Bailey, 2004), to unpack the notion of 'cultural awareness' contained in the ethical framework under the dimension of external/ecological ethics (Stutchbury & Fox, 2009). The original research design was principally the outcome of a review of academic literature undertaken by a researcher based in Greece but planning to study in the UK. It was the understanding of the context that challenged the initial design and helped the researcher identify several issues connected with it and proceed to a more ethical study. The dual positionality of the researcher as an 'outsider', both in terms of national and professional culture, was concluded as significant to accept, in order to develop a feasible and worthwhile study. Like Bridges (2002, p.73), whilst we do not accept the critique that 'only insiders can properly represent the experience of a community', having a fuller understanding of the UK teacher education community would have certainly allowed a quicker appreciation of a feasible and worthwhile research focus.

A second aspect of the learning was a fuller appreciation that those with direct participation in the community hold vital information for outsider researchers. Instead of thinking of these key individuals as 'gatekeepers', who simply allow access to the research site (Homan, 2002), gatekeepers can play a more central role in planning for

a beneficial study. Viewing gatekeepers as providing access and, even potentially assuming consent on behalf of others, is a deontological view of their role. What this view misses was realised when the UK teacher education programme leaders were contacted face-to-face, informing the researcher about the realities of the context and students' practices with social media, as well as offering insightful suggestions. In retrospect this might have been a much earlier discussion. This study has confirmed that "securing access to a research site can be an arduous and unnerving process, as well as fragile and tenuous" (Cipollone & Stitch, 2012, p.21), perhaps best described as a "dance of negotiations" (p.21). In retrospect it would have been productive (and more ethically sound) to have engaged the gatekeepers more fully in redesigning the study, in the spirit of building in "user engagement" (Edwards, Sebba & Rickinson, 2005). Co-designing a study is one possible implication of foregrounding consequential considerations to research design, requiring an airing of assumptions and agendas, as well as researchers' being open to negotiation. These discussions will now be taken forward with Greek programme leaders.

A third aspect of ethical learning was the flexibility required by the researcher, in order to address "unexpected events" (Whiteman, 2010, p.6). This is a response to the challenges of managing what some have called the "instability of research ethics" (Whiteman, 2010, p.8) and the dynamic and fluid nature of, not only the issues, but also awareness of them (e.g. Calvey, 2008; White & Bailey, 2004). In our study's case the redrafting of research questions and research design and redesign was a response to identifying and responding to a growing awareness of ethical issues involved. This paper has charted three snapshots of the research questions, but there were other variants considered along the journey. This exploration of possibilities is expected in the early stages of any study and is the core work of doctoral students

with their supervisors during the initial stages of a study. The authors of this paper propose that thinking comprehensively across ethical dimensions to a study contributes to the process of clarifying a worthwhile and feasible study focus. It can be assumed that, as the study progresses, further ethical learning will take place as new ethical issues emerge. Researcher responsiveness will continue to be needed, adopting a "process approach to ethics, which emphasizes the importance of addressing and resolving ethical issues as they arise in each stage of the project" (AoIR, 2012, p.12). Stutchbury and Fox's framework offers a way to approach comprehensive and ongoing appraisal of a study. The iterative nature of ethical review and reflection has consequences for gaining local and University level ethical approval.

In the case of local approval it was still viable to develop the main study n the UK, as the gatekeepers were still open to further suggestions. However, the researcher felt that too many requests had already been made of them. In the case of University level approval now that a change of research context has been decided, further ethics approval is needed from the home institution - from the Greek context. Multiple applications to the University ethical committee is a response to the acceptance by experienced educational researchers, such as Hammersley that; "…it is unlikely to be possible for researchers to anticipate and describe all the relevant circumstances of their research to ethics committees" (Hammersley, 2009, p.215). This may require multiple applications, or for less major changes, at least dialogue between researcher and research committee. In this study's case the ethics committees have shown understanding and their advice at each stage has been helpful in supporting the decisions made about a way forward. It may be advantageous to other doctoral students to be aware of the acceptability of multiple research designs and applications

for ethical approval. Whilst change is expected during the pilot phase of studies, this raises a question as to whether review of approval would be appropriate for University ethics committees to undertake as a study progresses? Assuming that ethical learning and within-study responsiveness to ethical issues arises in most educational research, this question is relevant to all studies.

In conclusion, trying to research the online lives of potential participants has required becoming familiar with the current contexts of these lives. Imposing an intervention study was found to be inappropriate: A more ethical approach was to find ways for potential participants to reveal these lives and their significance. Issues such as protecting privacy, offering confidentiality and gaining voluntary consent (whilst all valuable deontological concerns) can be offered by a researcher within the context of ensuring that the study is considered worthwhile and appropriate to the particular research context.

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Table 1

Four possible ethical aspects for appraisal of educational research

Aspect	Seedhouse's strands (1998)	Flinders' stances (1992)	Interpretation of commonalities (Stuchbury & Fox,, 2009)
1	External	Ecological	Consideration of external issues, e.g. the law, codes of practice, and resources available.
2	Consequential	Utilitarian	Consideration of the consequences of possible actions for various beneficiaries: society, particular groups and for individuals.
3	Deontological	Deontological	Covers issues concerned with 'duty' as far as affecting how things are done, rather than the consequences of doing them eg. 'telling the truth', being 'fair' and 'minimising harm/avoiding wrong'.
4	Individual	Relational	Places a focus on issues of respect for individuals associated with the study and allowing for their autonomy.

Note. Four possible ethical aspects for appraisal of educational research. Adapted from Stutchbury & Fox (2009)