Time to Connect: teaching information literacy skills in the online environment

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Background and Challenges

For several years students on the continuing professional development (CPD) module, *Care and Management of the Renal Patient,* at the School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Sheffield have been taught literature searching skills in a face-to-face workshop delivered by the Liaison Librarian for Medicine, Dentistry and Health. With the module now being offered as a fully online distance learning course this workshop has had to move into the online classroom.

While technology is increasingly making distance learning easier, teaching effectively online still involves navigating certain challenges [1]. Communication can be stilted without real face-to-face interaction, while retaining students' attention becomes even more important as they are no longer a 'captive audience'. Assisting with any IT difficulties encountered during literature searching also tends to be more problematic when experienced remotely leading to problems for both students and teachers.

In order to overcome these challenges therefore several strategies were employed.
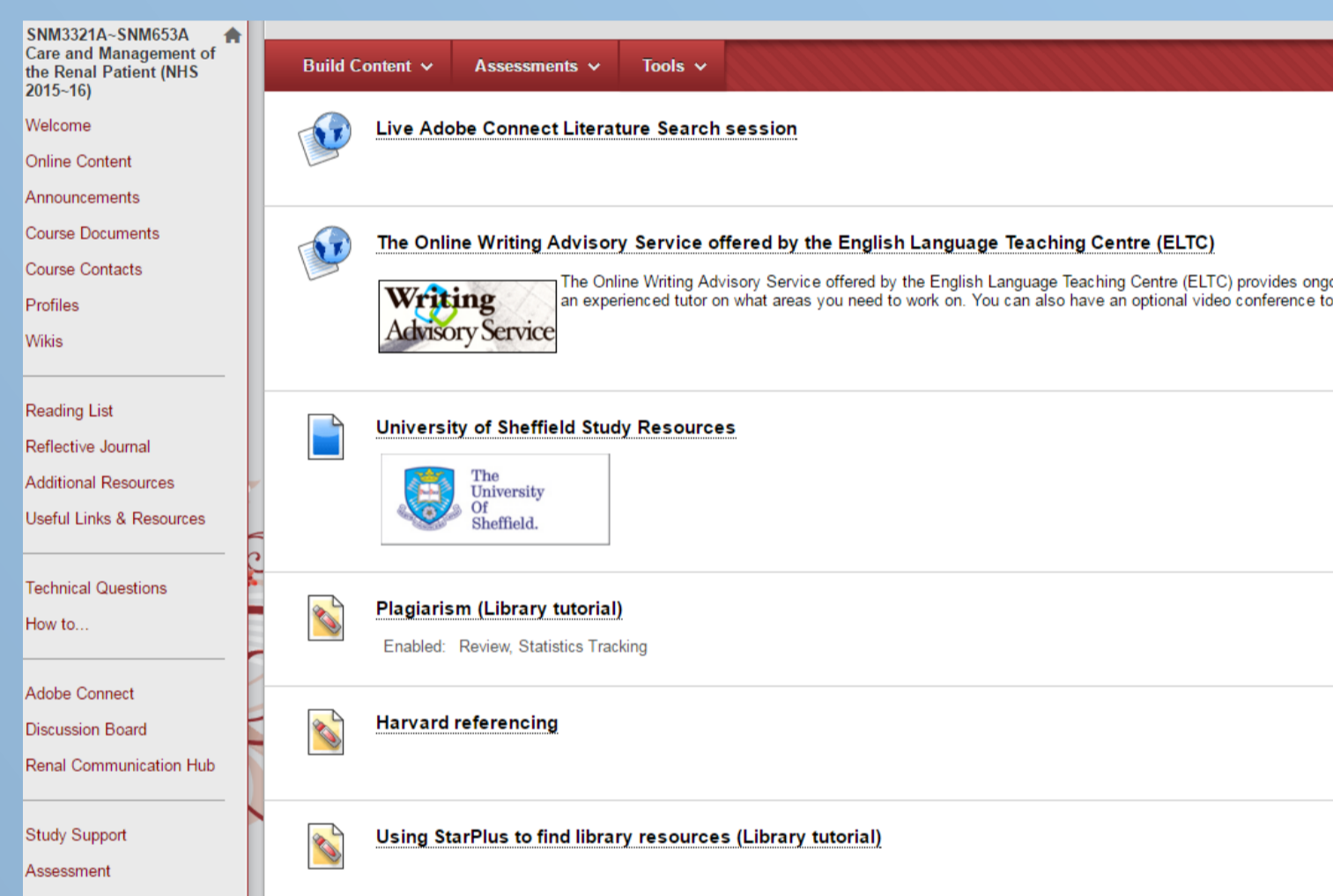
Solutions and Implementation

Firstly, rather than trying to replicate the hour long face-to-face workshop, activities were spread out across the first introductory week of the course.
- Monday - a live class was delivered via Adobe Connect giving students an opportunity to meet the librarian and for a short demonstration of the library's online resources to be given.
- Problem-solving activities were then set for students to complete in their own time.
- Friday - the librarian was invited back to another live Adobe Connect catch-up session allowing time for feedback and reflection.
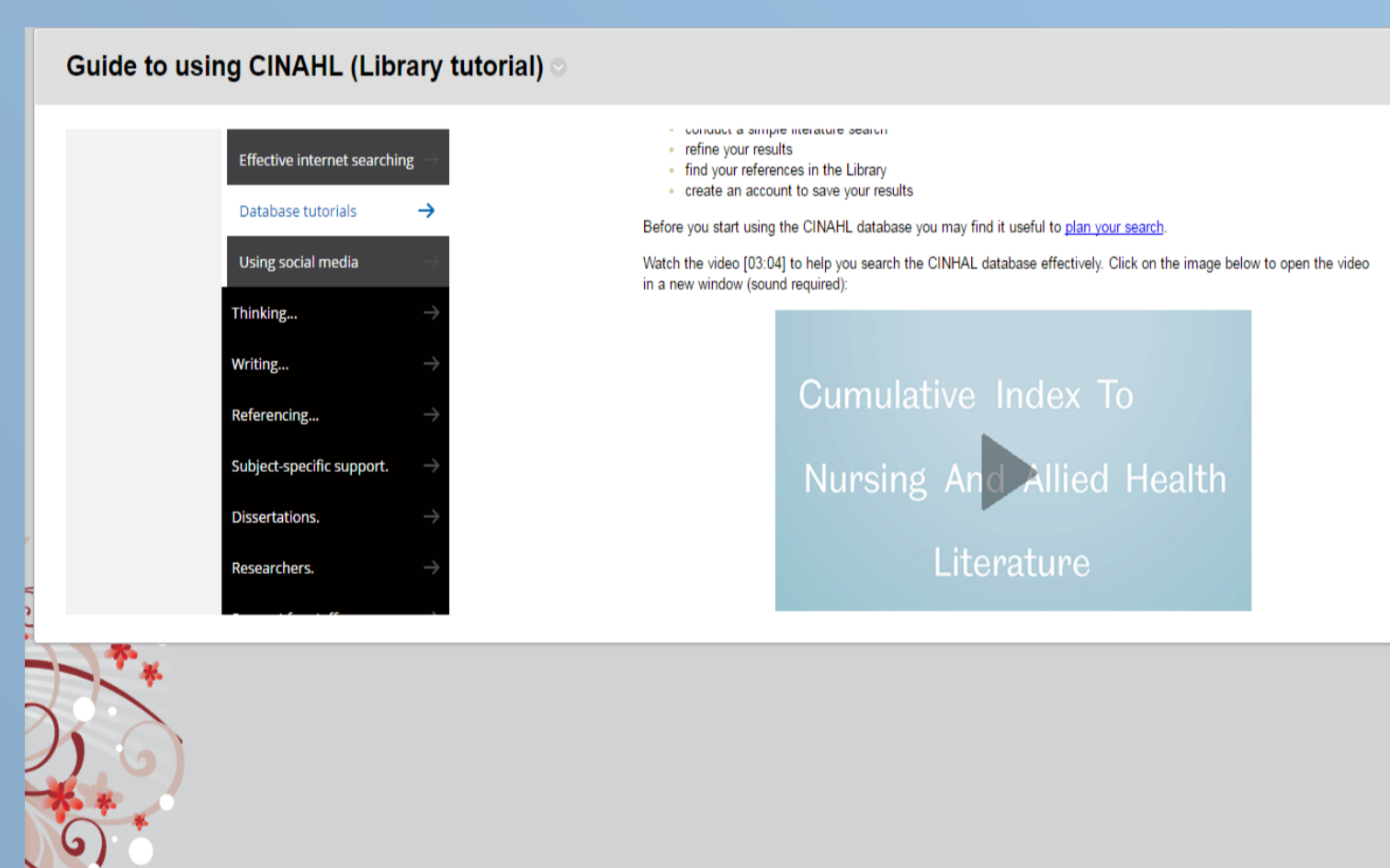
Secondly, full use was made of creative media tools to provide students with the information they needed.
- Screencasts of database searches and key library resources were produced on Camtasia and embedded into the students' online learning environment (MOLE). This meant that the live sessions could be about connecting with the students rather than just presenting information.
- The Adobe Connect sessions were also recorded and uploaded into MOLE giving students' the opportunity to refer back to them if needed.
- Instant chat was used to create discussions during the live sessions which allowed students to actively engage and feel part of a group in the same way they would in a face-to-face class.
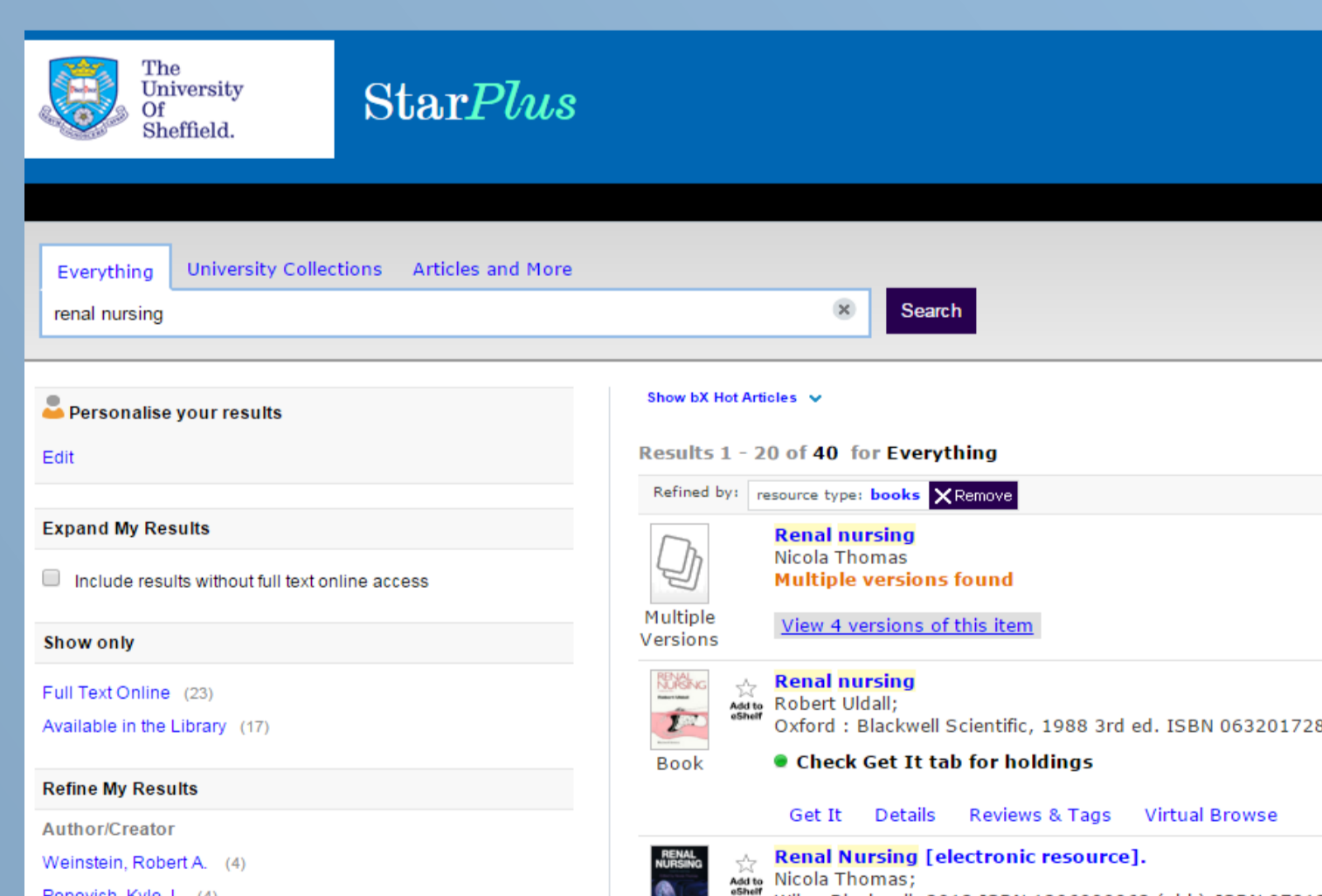
Thirdly, both sessions were attended by the course leader and the learning technologist from the School of Nursing & Midwifery who was invaluable at providing IT support.
- A team approach helped to create an informal and supportive environment for the students which in turn helped to encourage them to contact the team as questions arose. This meant that any problems were addressed quickly in the first week of the module and that students were straight away practising their literature searching skills in their own home environment rather than on-campus.

Reflection

In conclusion the move to online teaching proved to be a positive change for information skills delivery. While there were initial challenges to consider during the lesson planning stage the move to a week of bite-sized activities, the use of creative media and the team approach all helped to address these challenges and in turn allowed information literacy to be embedded even further into the course.

References
1. Ko, S., & Rossen, Steve. Teaching online: A practical guide (3rd ed.). New York ; London: Routledge. 2010. pp.187-190