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Communication skills in social work university training

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Background

- An established history of teaching communication skills
- The development of a model for feedback 1998 convincing to others
- A theoretical framework for the learning process derived from attachment theory and systems theory
- Good facilities

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Technological developments

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Optimal conditions

- Preparation and introduction to methods
- Time to digest new knowledge before practical sessions
- Formative feedback

Predictability and reliability

- Small groups 4-6
- Stable membership
- Regular place and time
- Same teacher

- Prescriptive approach: decisions about content
- Assessment of both skills and critically reflective analysis
- Evaluation to understand if the process makes a difference

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Measuring outcomes (Carpenter, 2005)

Level 1: Learners' reactions

Student evaluation

Level 2a: Modification in attitudes and perceptions.

Student reflective diaries

Level 2b Acquisition of knowledge and skills

Pre- and post-test assessment tasks; self-rating, actor rating and assessor

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Measuring outcomes (Carpenter, 2005)

Level 3: Changes in behaviour

Pre- and post-test assessment tasks; self-rating, actor rating and assessor

Level 4a: Changes in organisational practice

Not attempted

Level 4b Benefits to users and carers

Questionnaires

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Do students improve?

Methodology: multiple-measure case study design.

Sample: year 1 undergraduate

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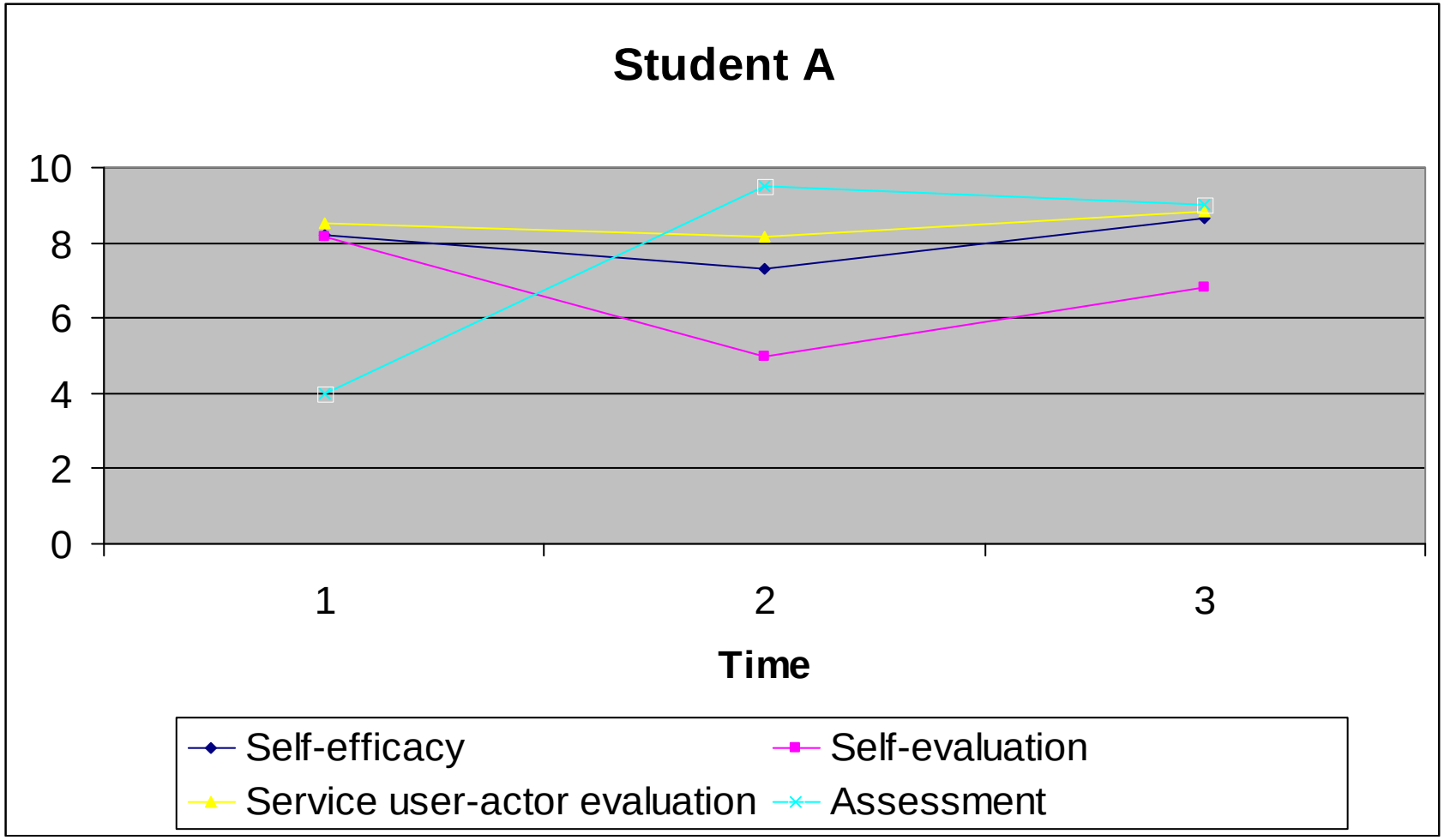
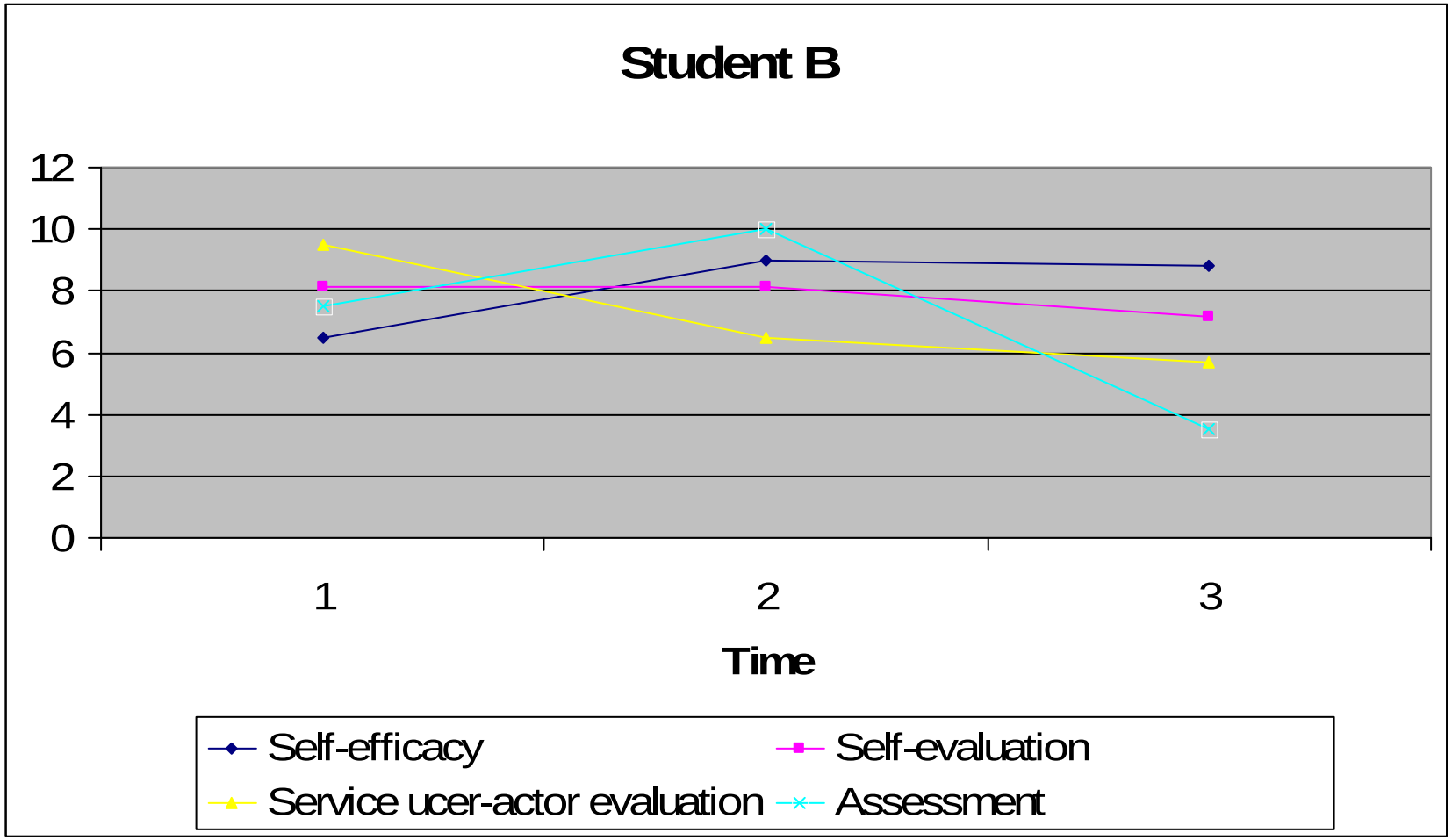
Data collection

- Self-efficacy scale
- Recorded interview with service user-actor
- Self-evaluation of interview
- Service user-actor evaluation
- Assessment of video-recording
- Feedback from service users on placement
- T1 = prior to teaching, T2 = 3 months later, after teaching, T3 = 9 months later, after first placement


Student A
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
2
3
Time
Self-efficacy
Self-evaluation
Service user-actor evaluation
Assessment


Student B
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
2
3
Time
Self-efficacy
Self-evaluation
Service ucer-actor evaluation
Assessment

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Conclusions

- Students may lose confidence as they acquire knowledge and understanding
- Effect of placement hard to disentangle
- Feedback from users and carers is sought but not systematically
- We still do not know enough about the transfer from the university to the workplace

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Next steps

- Start at the other end of the process: analysis of how qualified social workers communicate
- Identify patterns
- Develop teaching and learning opportunities
- Evaluate effects

Grazie

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References

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- Koprowska, J. (2010) Are student social workers' communication skills improved by university-based learning? In Burgess, H. and Carpenter J. Burgess, *The Outcomes of Social Work Education: developing evaluation methods*. Southampton: Higher Education Academy SWAP.