

Case Study

Student midwives' use of PebblePad to build an eportfolio to demonstrate placement learning

Debbie Holmes

Midwifery, School of Health and Wellbeing, The University of Wolverhampton, UK

Introduction

Student midwives train over 3 years for a BSc Hons. Degree and a Midwifery Registration. The course is based on 50% theory and 50% practice. The midwifery team of 10 lecturers currently support approximately 150-180 students to compile their portfolios. The students come from a variety of backgrounds and are aged between 18 and 52 years of age.

The current practice

The midwifery curriculum within the School of Health has, for some time, required the students to maintain a yearly 'paper' portfolio containing written evidence to support the achievement of the 'Standards of Proficiency for Practice' determined by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2004). The portfolio is also encouraged

to build evidence for continuing professional development (CPD), a requirement by the NMC for the registered midwife (NMC, 2006). The writing of a new curriculum gave the midwifery teaching team the opportunity to introduce an eportfolio as part of the year long practice modules.

“ The paper portfolio had become a collection of certificates and artifacts that did not particularly demonstrate learning. The presentation generally lacked creativity and personalization. ”

The challenge

By implementing the eportfolio the team hoped to meet some of the students' needs and requirements in relation to e-learning. There was also a hope that it would encourage students to be more creative in how they showcased evidence of learning in clinical practice. It was hoped the eportfolio would demonstrate development of skills and knowledge in relation to clinical practice and that this would be shared with personal teachers at the University and with the clinical mentors in practice. It was expected that communication with students in placement may increase and enhance the support systems that already existed.

To introduce an eportfolio was to move forward and meet the learning styles and requirements and expectations of 21st century students. The students' paper portfolio was very driven by demonstrating learning outcomes. It was hoped the eportfolio would encourage the students to think more about self outcomes and not rely solely on a competency outcome model. Self assessment is a skill that the team wished to encourage as the students are required to develop as reflective practitioners.

To do this students needed to personalise their portfolio by describing what they did in practice, and how this enhanced their learning by providing evidence of the learning. It needed to be about personal learning. In the electronic portfolio the outcomes are still required to be demonstrated but added 'layers' can demonstrate the personalization. There was a drive to encourage this creativity.

Technology for learning is much more likely to be used by the students if it is something they

are familiar with. The blogs within PebblePad are very similar to some social networking technologies. Networking can be important for learning and reflection. Net activity amongst students can be a powerful tool, and it made sense to harness this power of networking for learning.

Many midwifery students participate in an international online forum for student midwives before starting the programme. Instead of that being their only online space for interaction it was thought that the University PebblePad could provide an alternative that may compliment the communities they were already part of. The 'blogs' could then be linked to the eportfolio to demonstrate ongoing reflection and discussion on learning.

Retention and attrition were also considerations in the decision to introduce the eportfolio. Pre-course activities, supportive communities and increased communication could be facilitated through the use of PebblePad functions and the eportfolio.

The approach

A staff development retreat attended by the whole midwifery team enabled them to see what the University intended introducing, PebblePad, and the potential to create eportfolios. The midwifery team were then able to explore how this could be used within their teaching and learning strategy and how it could benefit their students. The team were in the process of rewriting the curriculum and decided to incorporate a mandatory eportfolio. The decision was based on the growing evidence within the University and Nationally in relation to the successes with the system PebblePad and the pedagogy behind electronic portfolios.



There was some resistance from the team. Some concerns were voiced in relation to changing something that was already in place and appeared to be working reasonably well; a paper portfolio. Other barriers were in relation to supporting students and the team to learn the skills required within PebblePad.

Students were encouraged to compile a portfolio providing at least one piece of evidence for each of the 18 placement learning outcomes. The aim was for students to learn the ITC skills required to use the system through learning tasks. The tasks were to engage the students with learning the skills of using the software by using meaningful tasks that were related to what they were enrolled to do; which was to become midwives. All of the teaching and support initially came from the module leader with support from the technology lead for the School of Health and Wellbeing.

Time factors were considered as was the degree of change. This was going to be mandatory for all students and this by far was the most underestimated factor as it has been difficult to evaluate all of the aspects. The module leader has been so busy implementing the project there has been little time to evaluate effectively.

The result

We are now on our seventh cohort of students. To date all students have managed to build and present a portfolio electronically. Some students provide the minimum requirements. Other students find the eportfolio an extremely useful learning tool and provide comprehensive stories and evidences for learning. Students do not currently receive a grade for the portfolio, but they do not pass clinical practice if they do not provide the minimum requirements. We now utilise ex students to assist with the teaching and learning.

Almost all of our modules in the curriculum use the electronic submission facility on PebblePad, many return prompt feedback this way too. Many of the modules in the curriculum use PebblePad to support learning and teaching. 'Blogs' form part of learning and teaching and have been used to support our 'blended learning strategy' within the University.

We now need to involve our clinical mentors more, but this will require consultation with our clinical links to enable us to be sure the systems in the Trust meet with the requirements of PebblePad. We have seen some success here but the work within the School of Health is ongoing.

The learning

The success of the implementation is far more likely to be achieved when the whole team, including the manager, are involved and are using the system themselves.

The more the project has developed the more teachers have become involved and developed their own skills. More teachers are also returning feedback electronically, and this has improved

the immediacy of the feedback for the students. Students no longer have to travel from placement or wait until they are next in University, they can access their feedback electronically

at their convenience. Teachers get to see what students are experiencing in practice and can help them make sense of situations they may find themselves in and can provide immediate feedback and support.

Members of the administration team have been keen to participate and have begun to take over some of the work of the module leaders in relation to setting up gateways for electronic submission.

In brief

- Students can improve their ITC skills through meaningful tasks within PebblePad.
- Teachers have improved their own skills by engaging with PebblePad.
- The use of PebblePad in other modules has increased.
- Students are becoming more creative in their presentation of evidence for placement learning in their eportfolios.
- Students are using the system to reflect on practice and learning.
- Timelines are crucial to provide opportunity for useful evaluation.

References

NMC, 2004. *Standards for proficiency for pre-registration nursing education*. [pdf] London:NMC. Available at: <http://www.nmc-uk.org/aDisplayDocument.aspx?documentID=328>.

Acknowledgements

Case study by Debbie Holmes
All images courtesy of University of Wolverhampton