



Using PebblePad for clinical assessment within an Operating Department Practice Programme: Considering the results of an empirical evaluation of student perspective and the potential for CPD

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A case study from PebblePad's 2016 'Future Ready' conference on preparing and equipping learners for their journey.

The research presented in this case study was conducted as part of a Post-Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice within the Learning Enhancement and Academic Practice Department at the University of Hull.

The Context

In 2005 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) outlined their strategy to assist the sector in embedding elearning into educational activity; a move which sought to bring higher education up to speed with contemporary shifts in technological use. Ten years on and the concept of technology enhanced learning (TEL) has evolved from niche practice to a routinely embedded function, seeking to use elearning to enhance student-centred, constructivist pedagogy (Stefani, Mason & Pegler, 2007). This case study explores how clinical eportfolios, as an extension of TEL, can be valuable for undergraduate health professional education and continued professional development (CPD).

In 2013 the University of Hull Operating Department Practice (ODP) programme re-validated, with a shift from the DipHE to a BSc(Hons) degree to meet the changed requirements of the curriculum (CODP, 2011). Changes to the clinical assessment strategy saw the introduction of PebblePad for developing a competency assessment eportfolio to replace the current paper-based portfolios. The clinical portfolio forms an element of summative assessment to be met each semester, as assessed by a clinical mentor. Each portfolio consists of a series of 6 themed learning outcomes which are broken down into performance criteria for which the student must demonstrate their competency. During re-validation and in line with the transition to using PebblePad, the ability for students to be assessed via a range of methods (written/observed/discussed) was introduced, replacing the requirement to provide a formal written statement for each performance criterion. Six reflections, based upon the learning outcome themes, were also added to the portfolio to enhance students' ability to reflect and apply theory to practice.

The eportfolio was designed as an auto-submit workbook within PebblePad and included a combination of student and assessor only fields. Whilst developed to be accessed during clinical placement, students were also encouraged to utilise the feedback panel to engage in dialogue with their mentor outside of placement hours, further enhancing the flexibility of assessment.

The Problem

The new style eportfolio was introduced to two student cohorts, first year and second year. With anecdotal evidence suggesting a positive response to the new electronic format, the ODP team felt that a small scale study would be beneficial to explore the response to the change in more detail and identify areas which require additional support or adaptation to better embed PebblePad within the programme.

For this case study two focal aims that align with the 'future ready' theme will be explored. These focal aims are:

1. To provide an empirical account of the experience of student ODPs using the PebblePad eportfolio for clinical assessment.
2. To explore whether use of the eportfolio encourages students to engage with wider facilities of PebblePad in developing their CPD Portfolio.

The Approach

A quantitative approach consisting of a questionnaire including Likert scale points was used to examine how the ODP students perceived the use of the PebblePad eportfolio and its impact upon their attitude towards developing their CPD portfolios. To allow for richer evaluation of the results, opportunity for qualitative feedback was also provided in the form of free-text boxes. Prior to commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained via both the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Health and Social Care research ethics committees at the University.

At the point at which the questionnaire was distributed, both cohorts of students had completed almost 3 semesters using the new PebblePad eportfolio for their clinical assessment. While the first year students had only ever had access to the eportfolio, the second year students had used the paper-based portfolio in their first year.

The Results

Across the two cohorts there was a total response rate of 66.7% (30 from a possible 45), consisting of 17 first and 13 second year students.

The student experience

From a broad consideration of the data, use of the eportfolio was positively received with 100% of both cohorts either agreeing or definitely agreeing that overall they were satisfied with their PebblePad experience. Notable positive qualitative feedback included:

“Good change [I] think it will help progress practice.”

“Overall I am satisfied with PebblePad as it is really handy for mentors and academic supervisors to keep track on student progression.”

“Pebble is a supportive move to me as it removed my written amount for placement, which allowed more time to learn the job role [and] spend [time] on my academic writing and studies.”

“Once you get to know how everything works it is easy and beneficial to [use] it. It stores all of your work in one place and is an excellent reference material for future.”

When asked to respond to the statement ‘I found the transition from the paper-based portfolio to the PebblePad eportfolio easy’, 50% of second year respondents strongly agreed, 28.6% agreed, and the remaining 21.4% of responses were neutral.

Within the 2nd year cohort 78.6% agreed or definitely agreed that the eportfolio offered increased flexibility when compared with the paper version. It is important to consider, however, the extent to which changes to the assessment options also impacted on the perception of increased flexibility. The qualitative feedback indicated that this was a contributing factor, with comments including *“Observations are a good addition”* and *“PebblePad allows you to have discussions with your mentor rather than having a piece of written work for everything”*.

To explore this issue further, reports were extracted from within PebblePad’s assessment area, ATLAS, which provided an overview of the range of assessment options used by students. The reports indicated that the alternative assessment methods of observation and discussion were used by the majority of students with a notable decrease in the use of written evidence to support clinical assessment. Comments such as *“PebblePad allows you to have discussions with your mentor rather than having a piece of written work for everything”* suggest that, for the students, the introduction of PebblePad and the new assessment options were closely tied. It is, therefore, difficult to say if the perceived flexibility was related to the eportfolio, to the assessment options, or a combination of the two. Although, notably, one student did comment positively on the flexibility of the eportfolio itself, stating, *“[It can] be accessed by both mentor and student when not together”*.

The most notable negative feedback related to access to devices to log in to PebblePad while on placement. 14.3% of second year students stated that they definitely disagreed with the statement *'The PebblePad portfolio is easy to access when I am on placement'*. From the perspective of the first year cohort access seemed to be less of an issue which may be attributed to them not having had any experience of other methods of portfolio assessment. Qualitative feedback further reflected the issues around access on placement with most comments being in relation to having access to a computer or issues with connectivity. One student also commented on restrictions on the use of personal devices.

The issue of accessibility raises a complex dichotomy. Whilst there is an assumption of portability attributed to the use of digital technology such as eportfolios (Stefani et al, 2007), it may also be argued that portability, in reality, is much more complex due to the resources required to make digital files useable. This situation may be remedied with the government initiative to ensure availability of open Wi-Fi within all NHS buildings (Press Association, 2015). Furthermore, a cultural shift may be required in which the use of digital devices is not perceived, or assumed to be perceived, negatively within clinical practice; something identified as a potential barrier in a pilot study trial of tablet personal computers for student nurses on placement (Bogossian, Kellett & Mason, 2008). During this study some students felt that the use of a digital device was either perceived as unnecessary or that staff would think they were not working. By altering the negative perception towards the use of digital devices within health care placements we can support the advancing changes with technology; thus preparing for a 'future ready' workforce of health care professionals where ICT is already beginning to show growth in areas such as patient record keeping.

Developing CPD portfolios

In relation to the use of PebblePad for CPD it was positive to note that 100% of first year students and 64.3% of second year students indicated that they either agreed or definitely agreed that PebblePad would make it easier for them to manage their CPD portfolio. Further, 94.1% of first year students and 78.6% of second year students indicated that they intended to use their PebblePad account to maintain their portfolio. This suggests a positive response to PebblePad more generally and also demonstrates that students were considering the benefits of using the system post-qualification and outside the remit of an educational programme. In considering the theme of 'future ready' it was interesting to note that one student stated *"...it is the future so sure why not?"*

However, whilst the initial response in relation to CPD was positive, the question of whether students had already begun to use PebblePad to develop their CPD portfolio presented a different picture. By contrast to those who planned to use it, only 17.6% of the first year students and 21.4% of second year students had already started to use their account for this function. This may be attributed to the limited time outside of study and may be something which the

academic team can start to incorporate into the programme in order to promote a 'future ready' attitude towards the use of technology to maintain a record of CPD.

In relation to the use of eportfolios within higher education, Jenson and Trevor (2014) acknowledged their own naivety in thinking that the introduction of an eportfolio with promise of post-graduation use would be embraced by their students. There is perhaps a suggestion here that more is required from the higher education institute in order to develop and nurture a lifelong learning attitude. Certainly from the perspective of an ODP programme there is a requirement to instill this quality in order to produce practitioners who understand the implications of maintaining safety and effective, evidence based practice through CPD activity. Furthermore, from a regulatory view point, the Health and Care Professions Council (2015) expects the maintenance of an explicit record of CPD, which can arguably be well developed through use of PebblePad.

One element of regulatory practice which may, however, present a barrier to the maintenance of an eportfolio is a lack of acceptance of digital technology for CPD purposes. Some regulators such as the HCPC (2015) imply that the portfolio, if requested for audit, must be presented in physical written format. With the HCPC standards having been updated in 2015 it could be argued that a more contemporary stance, using online submission, would have been appropriate to match the developments in technology. However, users of eportfolios do have the option to print their work which does allow the user the flexibility of meeting what could be deemed as outdated requirements.

As an extension to the use of PebblePad for assessment of clinical competency and in response to the literature which considers the need for a deep learning shift (Jenson & Trevor, 2014), the ODP team have also adopted the use of PebblePad for academic support; providing opportunities for students to reflect upon their academic journey and provide a place in which to hold action plans from tutorials. The eportfolio itself serves the purpose of directing the students towards their professional expectation to maintain an up-to-date CPD portfolio (HCPC, 2015) and encourage deep learning; something which presents an area to be researched further.

Lessons Learnt

Following positive results from the introduction of the PebblePad eportfolio for the clinical assessment of ODP students, the programme team will continue developing the use of PebblePad throughout the programme. Two key action points have been identified.

First, with access being identified as a barrier, time will be spent working in collaboration with clinical partners in order to look at strategies to improve access within clinical areas. This will be undertaken through regular Programme Management Team meetings, maintenance of the programme newsletter to disseminate good practice, and through regular mentorship updates

delivered within the clinical area. By improving accessibility the team hope to further enhance the positive response students have shown towards PebblePad.

Secondly, the team will continue to explore options for embedding PebblePad within the programme in order to encourage post-registration use for CPD. In development of the new third year module, the 'Independent Project', the team are considering presentation of the summative assessment via webfolio. This will aim to encourage wider, more confident use of PebblePad whilst allowing for more autonomy over the presentation when compared to the clinical workbook. By developing student confidence in using PebblePad creatively, the team can then assist students, during their final module, to begin developing their CPD portfolios in preparation for post-registration practice.

In Brief – Showcasing 'Future Readiness' with PebblePad

- The introduction of PebblePad within the ODP programme has provided a more flexible approach to clinical assessment which has been embraced by both students and mentors.
- Through engagement with PebblePad students have begun to consider how they can be prepared for their future practice and CPD requirements.
- The ODP team have gained a wealth of experience from which further developments can continue in order to further embed PebblePad within the programme to foster deep learning and enhance the concept of lifelong learning.

References

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