

making the case

Facilitating e-assessment (the grading of clinical practice) through the use of shared webfolios

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Theme(s)

Teaching/Professional Practice: Managing e-Assessment

The background context

This case study has built on previous work undertaken with the Blended Learning Unit within the College of Nursing, Midwifery and Healthcare of using PebblePad to provide formative feedback to students on work based learning experiences. The context and philosophy of this original work was to support student nurses on nursing programmes while they were out in clinical practice and to facilitate their ability to reflect on, and learn from, clinical practice. Other reported studies have demonstrated very similar findings to the outcomes of this small scale project at the University of West London (UWL) (Holmes, 2010; Haigh & Carrant, 2010).

The Next Stage: The Post Graduate Diploma (Pre-Registration) Nursing

In 2010 the Pre-registration Nursing programme team developed a MSc programme for pre-registration nursing. The students can exit this programme with a Post Graduate Diploma that meets the regulatory body requirements for registration as a nurse at the end of year two. This programme has a number of proficiencies and essential skills that must be met and this is a requirement of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), the regulatory body, and many of these are achieved in clinical practice. The NMC stipulate that there must be assessment of performance in practice but there is no requirement to grade practice.

Inherent in the philosophy of the curriculum development team was the belief that collaborative working with practice partners is the cornerstone of high quality nursing education, in that practice education prepares practitioners that are fit for

professional registration and academic award (UWL, 2010). For this reason, during the curriculum development phase there were discussions and critical debate with practice partners around the concept of using an eportfolio to assess and grade clinical practice. A literature review was also undertaken to help with the decision making process. The curriculum development team decided:

- There was a value to grading students' level of application of theoretical knowledge to the development of proficiency in practice, as this gave formal recognition to the practice component of the curriculum (QAA, 2007). The grading of application of theoretical knowledge allows the student to demonstrate clinical reasoning skills and goes beyond 'showing and doing' (Wilson & Scammell, 2010).
- Grading practice would be important for students in that it provides feedback and a clear indication to the student as to how they are progressing in practice. Good feedback is valued by students because the more students practice and get feedback the deeper they understand what they are learning and the more adept they become at managing complexity which is vital in healthcare programmes (Gibbs, 2010).
- The themes of assessment developed throughout the programme would be linked to the NMC proficiencies:
 - a. Professional and ethical practice
 - b. Care delivery
 - c. Care management
 - d. Personal and professional practice
- To use a tripartite system of grading to address issues related to validity and reliability of grading clinical practice as described in the literature (Wilson & Scammell, 2010).

- That based on previous experience PebblePad would be the most suitable tool for assessment and grading of practice through the use of webfolios.

Why PebblePad?

Through developing and planning innovation into our curriculum design the programme team have been able to involve the mentors in the workplace in the collaborative process of assessing and grading student nurses in clinical practice. The grade awarded is the summative mark for an academic credit bearing module.

The purpose

Tripartite Assessment – involving students, mentors, and personal tutors in the marking and grading of clinical practice via the use of webfolios.

The tripartite system of grading clinical practice involves the student, the mentor and the personal tutor in the assessment and grading of the students' summative clinical practice assessment document via PebblePad. The purpose of using a tripartite system of grading was to address issues related to validity and reliability of grading clinical practice as described in the literature (Wilson & Scammell, 2010).

The proposal was that

- The students have a practice assessment document which outlines the competencies to be achieved. The mentor works with the student to facilitate the development of an action plan to assess the student's level of competence practice.
- The student develops an action plan and produces a series of assets in a webfolio that demonstrates how they are embedding evidence based practice in the agreed assessment areas (professional and ethical practice, care delivery, and care management). The students also have to reflect on how they have developed personally and professionally within that placement area.
- Throughout the placement the student can share their evidence in the webfolio with other students, mentors and personal tutors for comment and formative feedback on the work produced so far.
- At the midpoint and final interviews there is collaboration between the mentor and the personal tutor in judging the quality and standard of the evidence provided by the student to demonstrate their understanding of the evidence base used to underpin clinical practice, and a final summative grade is awarded.

This collaboration in the overall marking of the practice assessment document between the student, mentor and personal tutor is known as the tripartite system.

The approach

Action research was used by the programme team to undertake a small scale study to share lessons learnt from the development, implementation, and evaluation of the assessment and grading of practice. This method was chosen as it allowed the team to analyse in a systematic way the impact of implementing a change to the assessment process in the multivariate context of clinical practice (Kim, 2009).

The aims of the study were to:

- Involve all key stakeholders (Clinical Placement Partners, e-learning development support from the university, the mentors, and student representatives) to produce a strategy to put the above framework into action.
- Prepare resources for staff development and training:
 - a. Personal tutors
 - b. Mentors
 - c. Students
- Embed an evaluation strategy that allowed the team to reflect and compare early assumptions, identify early any potential problems and/or opportunities, and identify new and unexpected themes that may be emerging

The result

Findings so far (emerging themes)

- It is possible to grade clinical practice through the use of webfolios and the tripartite system.
- NHS firewalls are very problematic – but not insurmountable.
- Preparation of mentors in practice is key.
- The support from the e-learning development team is critical.
- It is important to have a strategy for scaling up support to practice (as cohort sizes increase).

The impact

Emerging themes (unexpected) – Adding benefits to the teaching, learning, and assessment experience for the student

- It appears that grading clinical practice promotes student engagement in the assessment process in clinical practice.
- Creating their own webfolios inspires students to produce varied and creative work.
- Students seek out and receive regular and appropriate feedback.
- There is evidence of meaningful learning in the webfolios.
- The students demonstrate a high level of reflective thinking.
- Students are engaged in the process and evaluate it well.
- Mentors are supportive of the process (seen as personal learning and development).
- The process is seen as innovative (as evidenced in reports from NMC reviews and UWL Periodic Reviews).

Lessons learnt

Strengths

- Grading students via the tripartite system is not difficult.
- There is better communication between the mentor assessing practice and the personal tutor.
- The overall strength that was not expected is the apparent value added benefits in the learning and assessment process for the students.

Opportunities

- With on-going evaluation and support there is the opportunity to develop this format of assessment and grading further in other healthcare programmes.
- There are other opportunities for PebblePad to be used for e-assessment in healthcare programmes.

Challenges

- The preparation of mentors has been very time consuming in the developmental stage.
- The main challenge that was not foreseen was the issue related to firewalls in NHS Trusts.

What would we do differently?

- Set up gateways for submission of work from the very beginning. We did not do this in the initial stage and the management of assets was challenging.
- Undertake pilot work with the trusts in relation to submitting work through the Firewalls.

In brief – making the case for PebblePad

- PebblePad is a flexible tool that can be used for e-assessment.
- It offers a feasible way of grading students on work based learning experiences.
- It has improved and strengthened the method of communication between personal tutors and mentors.
- Collaboration with the e-learning team in the university is vital in developing smooth processes for e-assessment.

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