Master of Midwifery: A postgraduate program’s first use of eportfolios

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Chosen theme(s)

Unit level implementation
Program curriculum
Professional learning and accreditation

The context

In 2013 the University of the Sunshine Coast undertook an ePortfolio Early Adopter Phase using PebblePad. As part of this phase the Master of Midwifery, offered both full time and part time, was the first postgraduate program to use ePortfolios at the University. ePortfolios were introduced to the same cohort of students across two semesters; Semester 1 NUR700 Theory for Midwifery Practice (14 students) and in Semester 2 NUR729 Midwifery Practicum (11 students). Implementation support was provided by the Centre for the Support and Advancement of Learning and Teaching (C-SALT). However, the implementation phase was short meaning that teaching staff and students learnt to use this new technology simultaneously.

The Approach: How was the curriculum delivered previously and why was it changed?

The Masters of Midwifery program was reaccredited in 2013 which meant that for the first time student midwives were required to follow 20 women through their childbearing experience in order to meet registration requirements at the end of their program. In addition students also had to complete other statutory requirements such as 100 antenatal and postnatal examinations. Documentation of these experiences was anticipated to be cumbersome as previously student midwives were only required to record follow through experiences with five women and present this in hard copy in a paper folder.
PebblePad was seen to offer an opportune electronic storage system where students could collate evidence for registration purposes.

In Semester 1 students were introduced to pre-made asset templates which they completed after each individual learning experience with women. Students then shared their completed templates with their lecturer in a formative manner via ATLAS and students received written feedback. Discussion and ongoing support about the completion of templates was provided in class but increasing use of the ATLAS feedback resource by students became time consuming for the lecturer as students became more proficient. Therefore students were instructed how to amalgamate assets into webfolios. This scaffolding of learning introduced students to elements of PebblePad in a sequenced approach rather than bombarding students with less IT skills with ambitious expectations.

For students unenthusiastic about their eportfolio, attempts to increase the tool appeal involved efforts to personalise the tool with photographs and their professional CV, and highlight the convenience and flexibility of completing records on the go via mobile phone or tablet. Nevertheless, some students identified that unless the eportfolio served as an assessment piece they would resist the online version, preferring to submit hard copy evidence. This option involves repetition of evidence across the professional standards. For example each antenatal examination would need to be written as one of the 100 antenatal checks and again as an antenatal experience with a continuity of care experience.

In Semester 2, 4 out of the 11 students chose to continue to use PebblePad as their data storage for clinical requirements and continuity of care experiences. The remainder of the students chose to record and submit data using the hardcopy evidence provided. Feedback from the students highlighted the reluctance to undertake the extra hours of interactive support during the course and felt overwhelmed with the prospect of additional learning. Those who continued to utilise PebblePad emphasised the engaging ways in which they had learnt to be creative with their eportfolios and were able to identify the benefits for their future professional interactions with prospective employers.

Lecturers saw PebblePad as a useful tool to refine the documentation process of all clinical interactions and expected clinical experiences required by students to successfully obtain registration as a midwife. The lecturers also wanted students to develop their CV and store evidence for continuing professional development (CPD). Once students graduate and become registered midwives it is a requirement for them to maintain their CPD. This online eportfolio repository provides an efficient way in which to store this evidence and display achievement of this to future or current employers.
Collaboration and support

C~SALT staff and the midwifery lecturers worked together to design the eportfolio implementation and to build their skill levels with the view that the lecturers would then work to enable the students' eportfolio use. Activities undertaken between C~SALT staff and lecturers included an introduction to eportfolios and PebblePad and later training sessions, planning meetings on how to build eportfolios into the courses, one-to-one support in creating customised templates (see Appendix 1), and finally a debriefing meeting at the end of the year.

Evaluation

Another collaborative aspect of this eportfolio implementation was the development of a research partnership between C~SALT and the Master of Midwifery lecturers. The eportfolio project manager designed the research project and gained human ethics permission for data collection. C~SALT staff administered pre and post-usage surveys with the students at the beginning and end of the year as well as leading a focus group in Semester 2, 2013. Furthermore, C~SALT staff collected post-usage surveys from the academic teaching staff about their experience in using ePortfolios.

Participants from the three groups involved in this implementation process shared their thoughts about the value of ePortfolios in meeting the students' learning needs.

I see ePortfolios as valuable as the creation of evidence once can be linked to other areas, saving time for the student.

[Teaching Staff Member 1]

I think the program has value, [there is a] need to consider timeframe of implementation and value to students.

[Teaching Staff Member 2]

Good for reflective practice: learning and also appointment record.

[Student 1]

[I was]...able to keep track of things to meet requirements for follow-throughs.

[Student 2]
There is so much benefit in having everything collated into one place.

[Student 3]

When I look at eportfolios I see the possibilities of what can be done there is a lot of value...in five years’ time when you look back... you have something that’s accessible, it is still there, you reflected on it when it happened and five years on you benefit from it.

[C~SALT Staff Member 1]

It’s very much about how you integrated it into the course.

[C~SALT Staff Member 2]

I want to see people using it successfully.

[C~SALT Staff Member 3]

How it is now ....

This Early Adopter Phase with this first cohort of Master of Midwifery students showed that there is a wide range of digital literacy skills evident amongst the cohort with some students finding it relatively easy to use PebblePad while others found it a struggle, particularly within the context of high workload demands. However, all students had the opportunity to improve their current digital literacy by using the eportfolio software whether on a regular or infrequent basis. Identified issues with duplication of practicum documentation in order to submit it as artifacts into PebblePad was addressed through adjustments to the volume of work required of the students for the ‘follow through’ cases assessment task.

In 2014 the eportfolio will be embedded into course assessments and the curriculum. In light of the short timeframe of 18 months, courses within this Masters of Midwifery program have been adjusted to accommodate further workshop opportunities for future students in order to increase students’ confidence in their competence to create eportfolios for storing evidence ready for registration. Weekly support and regular workshops will be conducted throughout the semester to engage students and increase their confidence and self-sufficiency in preparation for Semester 2.

Assessment for the clinical portfolio and recording of all clinical experiences have been streamlined by the use of webfolios and are now more efficient for both students and lecturers as PebblePad is easy to access and view work, allowing the giving of timely feedback whilst still monitoring progress.
What have we learnt through this experience?

Students learnt how to use an eportfolio to record their follow through experiences and store documentation and evidence of clinical activities. They learnt a new way of managing data, and how to showcase experiences and enhance their CVs. Students and lecturers had opportunity to improve their current level of digital literacy and be exposed to future technological advances in storing and showcasing evidence for multiple purposes and audiences.

This experience reinforced that any anticipated eportfolio use for students needs to be embedded into the course curriculum and assessment regime early, and learning activities need to be staggered to support the different IT abilities. In order to engage students and encourage them to invest their time and interest the eportfolio has been made a critical part of the assessment process. The completion of the eportfolio assessment will be supported through additional workshops created through an adjustment to the curriculum. The assessment has been staged to provide formative and summative incremental submission.

The length of the course and the workloads of staff and students need to be considered in the expectations of what students are required to complete using eportfolios. The experience also highlighted the importance of supporting both lecturers and students in their eportfolio learning process.

How has PebblePad helped to ‘personalise the curriculum?’

There are a number of ways in which PebblePad provided opportunities to shape the Masters of Midwifery curriculum.

- In the first year of this program the use of PebblePad has concentrated on using the tool as a learning strategy, particularly to guide new student midwives in professional documentation processes and reflective practice entries in line with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia’s (NMBA) standards.
- The use of PebblePad enabled lecturers to produce specialised templates that allowed students to directly link their learning to registration requirements.
- Similarly, eportfolios could be customised by the individual student for personal use to record their interactions with women and the requirements to meet the national standards for registration as a midwife that dictate the program curricula.
- Provided ‘a one stop’ location for the storage of evidence particularly for accreditation purposes.
- PebblePad enables the contemporaneous addition of information to accumulate evidence of the statutory number of care interactions dictated by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC). Previously students were required to accumulate documentary evidence as a folder which required duplication of recurrent entries.
- ATLAS provides lecturer-student connection so that feedback can be given to support development of reflective tangents or correct any inaccuracies.
Appendix - Customised Templates Developed for Student Use

The following templates were designed for students to use as part of their ‘follow through’ cases.

Clinical Experience Record

Individual Follow Through

Appraisal and Feedback
Clinical Competency Assessment

Episodes of Care

Pebble Learning
PEBBLEPAD CASE STUDIES 2014
Labour and Birth Experience

Labour and Birth Experiences
Use a number and/or a brief descriptive title

Date of labour and birth experience

Fellow Through?
Was this woman one of your ‘fellow through’ experiences?

- Yes
- No

If yes - which woman?

Parity:
- Gestaion Para ?

Gestation

Risk status
- Low risk (uncomplicated, spontaneous, vaginal birth)
- High risk before labour (e.g. pre-eclampsia)
- Became high risk during labour (e.g. augmentation, complications arising)

Comments
What was the high risk or ‘complicated’ about this labour and birth?

Comfort measures / analgesia
- warm packs, water immersion, pethidine etc.

Reflections on the labour
What were your observations about this woman and her labour? How did you support this woman during her labour?

Type of birth
- Spontaneous vaginal
- Ventouse
- Forceps
- Emergency c-section
- Planned c-section

Reflections on the birth of the baby
What position did the woman birth in? Was it a natural birth? How did you support the woman during birth? How did you support?

Placental birth
- Physiological placental birth
- Actively managed placental birth

Reflections on the birth of the placenta
What factors influenced the management of the placental birth? When was the cord clamped and cut?

Immediate postnatal care and assessment - mother and baby
- Placenta complete/Skin to skin? Did baby breastfeed? How did you support attachment and bonding?

Additional comments and reflection
Personal Activities

Antenatal Experiences