

The use of an integrated technology supported learning approach to mentorship of students in work based placements

Wendy Moran
School of Health

Abstract

Mentorship of pre-registration students in work place settings is central to current programmes of pre registration nurse education. This innovation project aimed to develop and evaluate the use of a CD-Rom package aimed at providing learning opportunities for workplace mentors of students (practice assessors), to develop their role. The project findings suggest this is a cost effective approach worthy of adoption by the School of Health.

Background and rationale

With regard to nursing students, Brown & Edelmann (2000) suggest “The role of mentor in supporting students is regarded as vital”.

There are approximately 1600 pre-registration nursing students in our School undertaking 3 year programmes leading to Professional Registration and Diploma (RN/Dip.H.E.) or Degree (RN/BSc) Awards. 50% of these programmes are practice based, mostly consisting of 6-8 week practice placements (2,300 hours in total). Whilst undertaking practice placements, students are assigned a mentor (practice assessor). The mentor has both a learning and teaching role with students and also undertakes summative assessment of student competence in practice. There are currently several approaches to preparing and supporting mentors. Such preparation is a mandatory requirement, with recently revised guidelines stating that mentors will require a “robust preparation for their role” (ENB 2001).

It was felt that a CD-Rom package would provide a mechanism to ensure consistency of information provided for practice assessors. Additionally, the learning activities provided would enable users to collate electronic/ hard copy evidence of learning. This could be used in their professional portfolios or as part of the Quality Assurance mechanism (Education Audit), which is undertaken by HEP's to ensure placement standards.

The Innovation

Development of the CD-Rom

This first phase involved identifying content for the CD-Rom. This was undertaken through a search of the literature. Specifically, materials produced by the (then) Professional Bodies, were consulted, in order to ensure currency of content. It was identified that a key area pertained to School specific information (e.g. programme detail). This was acquired from current Award Guides and supporting documentation. An existing SOH Working Group (The Practice Assessor Sub-Group) was identified as an appropriate ‘expert group’ for the validation of materials. This group met monthly. The process of developing content also

involved close collaboration with the School's Courseware Development Unit, who developed several variations of the CD-Rom for scrutiny by the expert group.

Distribution of the CD-Rom

150 copies of the CD Rom were distributed to Practice Assessors. This constituted a sample which represented 10% of the total population of Practice Assessors on the School of Health database of Practice Assessors. (In order to be representative, a random sample of Practice Assessors for each Trust was made). The distribution of CD-Roms to Practice Assessors was undertaken by Clinical Placement Co-ordinators for each Trust. Thus each clinical Placement Co-ordinator delivered 10-12 CD-Roms to identified staff. In addition, some staff used the CD-Rom as part of the existing workshops with Practice Assessors. 10 copies of the CD-Rom were distributed to academic staff.

Evaluation of the CD-Rom

Each user was presented with a CD-Rom in an envelope containing a letter thanking them for their participation and providing guidelines for submitting evaluations. It was advised that evaluation could be printed and submitted in hard copy, or submitted via email.

28 Evaluations were received. This comprised a 19% return. Evaluation findings (Table 1) and a selection of comments (Table2) are provided.

These can be further categorised as:

- Strengths of CD-Rom Package
- Weaknesses of CD-Rom Package
- Areas for future development

Table 1

Evaluation of CD Rom

Table 2

Did you like the information presented on the CD Rom		Yes (n = 26)	No (n = 2)
Do you think the information presented is:	Comprehensive (n = 15)	Adequate (n = 12)	Inadequate (n = 0)
	Very Easy (n = 10)	Easy (n = 13)	Not Easy (n = 5)

General Comments

Positive

'I find it more convenient to work through the CD as I can choose a time that is more suitable to myself. It is also useful to look back on, should I need to check on any information'

'Very useful tool to keep up-to-date with changes, without taking time out during working day'.

'A useful information and learning tool. An excellent way of updating staff'.

'Useful content, well laid out, attractive to look at – very user friendly'.

'As a non-computer user, I was put off using the CD. However, after being shown once, I was able to follow the format easily (to my surprise!)'.

'Referral of students a particularly useful section'.

'Excellent CD-Rom, which held my interest'.

'Very good resource to keep at ward level'.

Negative

'It was not that easy to read the literature or find your way around – there were bits I missed out'.

'Our ward's computer does not use CD's and not everyone has a computer'.

'I could not print off the answers satisfactorily. I have tried to finish this today, only for it to collapse on me and state there was a fault in the programme'.

'Some information a little dated'.

'It is quite long and I found myself stopping and then going back, which meant I had to remember where I had got to'.

'I was unable to view the CD at work as no CD-Rom was available'.

Strengths and weaknesses of the CD-Rom Package

Strengths and weaknesses can generally be identified in relation to user friendliness and content.

Strengths

User Friendliness

The CD-Rom appears to provide the user with a convenient and flexible mechanism of accessing information and learning activities. The presentation of information on CD-Rom also provides staff with the opportunity to revisit information and activities.

Content

Users generally found the information comprehensive and relevant. A number of users provided extensive feedback regarding areas which could be expanded or included.

Weaknesses

User Friendliness

Some staff had difficulty gaining access to computers with CD-Rom drives. Access appears variable both to personal computers and in the workplace setting.

A small number of staff appeared to experience difficulties in 'finding their way around' the CD-Rom or in printing out material⁷.

Content

Some users were critical of aspects of the content. This related to:

- spelling
- grammar
- terminology
- accuracy/currency of some material

Discussion of evaluation findings

The findings generally suggest that the CD-Rom would constitute a valuable component of a wider approach to the preparation and ongoing support of staff in their role as Practice Assessors. The CD-Rom appears to be an effective mechanism for providing consistent information to a large number of staff working in diverse settings. It is recognised that the number of evaluations received was relatively small and may not be representative of the total population of Practice Assessors. Critically, one has to question whether evaluations were not received because of difficulties in computer access/usage. However, those evaluations which were received generally contained a comprehensive range of comments which were overwhelmingly positive. One concludes, therefore, that the potential benefits of the approach, as determined through this project, meant a wider use of the CD-package by the SOH. In using the CD-Rom academic staff resources can be redirected towards other approaches in the facilitation of learning, teaching and assessing in practice placement.

A final consideration relates to the platform in which the material is delivered. The CD-Rom was originally chosen to maximise flexibility, as opposed, for example, to the SOH web pages or the University's VLE (WOLF). However there does seem to be merit in developing materials on School web pages, in order to provide alternative route of electronic access. Developing materials through WOLF would currently be problematic, as most Practice Assessors do not have right of access.

Agenda for future development

- Revisit CD content to address comments from Project Evaluation (and then annually);
- Revisit CD format to ensure maximum user friendliness (and then annually);
- Distribute CD-Rom to all finalist pre-registration students, D grade Staff Nurses and Practice Assessors annually;
- Develop a CD-Rom package to support Learning Teaching and Assessment for Midwifery Supervisors and students;
- Develop materials on SOH web pages.

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