



Innovation in preregistration midwifery education: Web based interactive storytelling learning

Mandie Scamell, RM, PhD, MA, PGCert, MRes, BA^{a,*}, Thomas Hanley, BA (Hons), MSc, PGCE, PGCert, FHEA^b

^a Centre for Maternal and Child Health Research, School of Health Sciences, Northampton Square, City University London, EC1V 0HB, United Kingdom

^b Learning Enhancement and Development, Northampton Square, City University London, EC1V 0HB, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Midwifery education
Compassion
Empathy
Moodle
Web based
Simulated practice

ABSTRACT

Background: through a critical description of the implementation of a web based interactive storytelling learning activity introduced into an undergraduate, preregistration midwifery education programme, this paper will explore how low-cost, low-fidelity online storytelling, designed using Moodle, can be used to enhance students' understanding of compassion and empathy in practice.

Sample: cross sectional sample of first year undergraduate Midwifery students (n111)

Method: drawing from both research and audit data collected in an Higher Education Institution in London England, the paper presents the case for using web based technology to create a sustainable model for midwifery education.

Findings: initial results indicate that it is both the low cost and positive student evaluations of web based interactive storytelling, which make this approach to preregistration midwifery education which suggests that this approach has significant potential for learning and teaching in midwifery education in diverse settings around the world. Or how about: global relevance?

Introduction

There is a general consensus that compassion and empathy are essential components to safe and effective midwifery practice. Despite this, troubling evidence from all over the world suggests that qualified midwives can fail to embrace these core values in their everyday practice (Bowser and Hill, 2010; White Ribbon Alliance, 2011; WHO, 2015; Kirkup, 2015). Given the significant benefit to women, the inclusion of an effective method for midwifery students to experience what compassionate and empathetic care looks like, and how it feels to receive it (or not receive it), was considered to be fundamental to the development of a first year, BSc midwifery professional practice module. The objective of this paper is to firstly, provide a description of a technologically based educational devise – online storytelling – that was used for the exploration of empathy through experiential learning; secondly, present empirical evidence collected to capture students' evaluation of this pedagogic approach to learning to care. This online learning was designed to emulate a practice environment where students could apply their theoretical learning of the ethics of professional practice, to authentic tasks

involving complex decision-making. The blended learning module described in this paper was delivered as part of a preregistration programme in London England.

In the paper we firstly describe the fictional, virtual community we created to host an interactive role-play. This description will be followed by the presentation of two discrete and different types of data - student authored, web based interactive storytelling, collected for auditing and showcase purposes and secondary outcomes of a research project designed to test a blended learning evaluation tool. Using this material, the paper will illustrate our successes and failures in enhancing the students' understanding and insight into compassionate and empathetic care through web based interactive storytelling.

Background

Higher education across a range of health professions has embraced the use of interactive technology, both virtual and physical, in its preregistration education delivery. Student opportunities to learn and consolidate professional knowledge and skills using tech-

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Mandie.scamell.1@city.ac.uk (M. Scamell).

nology enhanced learning environments range from hands on clinical simulators (Reilly and Spratt, 2007; McKenna, 2011) to high fidelity online gaming (Kiili, 2005; Boulos et al., 2007; Jarmon et al., 2009; Wiecha et al. 2010). Uptake of a pedagogy using online simulated practice in midwifery, however, has been relatively slow. Furthermore, both simulated approaches to practice learning, while successful in many high-income country contexts, are limited by the financial investment required and level of technological expertise needed for their development. Sustaining such technology-enhanced learning environments are consequently viable only for those institutions that have the substantial resources necessary to invest in both technology and people. In response to the intensification of the austerity measures within public funded Higher Education in the UK, we set out to provide first year preregistration Midwifery students with an online interactive learning environment that embedded the core values of compassion and empathy into their learning experience without incurring a significant cost burden to the publically funded University. What is distinct about the online content delivery described in this paper is the adaptation of the principles of 'serious gaming' (Ritterfeld et al., 2009) – gaming that is undertaken for educational purposes- to a low-fidelity and importantly low cost, open source learning platform – Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) a free open-source e-learning management system. It is a relatively low cost technology-enhanced learning environment that could have application world-wide.

Methods

This section of the paper has a dual purpose, reflecting the dual aim of the paper itself. This duality stems from our desire to describe both the intervention itself – the web based interactive storytelling learning – as well as the audit and secondary research outcomes that arose out of this intervention. The first part of this methods section will focus on describing the online role-play environment that was created for two cohorts of undergraduate midwifery students in the academic years 2014/15 and 2015/16. This will be followed by a description of the data collected through both audit and primary research.

The intervention

Since learning by doing is considered to be a useful for device for the acquirement of the tacit knowledge that is intrinsically bound to the action itself, in this case caring, Health education programmes emphasise the importance of practice based learning – both simulated and real. What such learning experiences do not necessarily provide however, is a sense of the experiential knowledge from the service user's perspective: How it feels to be on the receiving end of the care. In an effort to provide such learning, thereby giving students a lived experience where empathy could be explored, we developed two fictional immersive communities in Moodle: Beccasville and Charlotesville.

Using these relatively Moodle based activities, first year midwifery undergraduate students were able to experience what it is like to make autonomous clinical decisions as a midwife and more importantly, what it feels like to be in the shoes of the service user affected by these clinical decisions.

Each student had the opportunity to play both a midwife and a client as the roles were reversed when the role-play moved from one fictional community to the other. Storytelling was an essential component to the design of the role-play. Plot development devices, strongly defined characters and dilemmas designed to encourage the students to scrutinise their own preconceived ideas and prejudices were embedded throughout the role-play. Character information about the midwife was provided upfront, information about the

woman's character and her domestic circumstances was released sequentially as the role-play developed. This drip-feed approach was designed to encourage dynamic and responsive decision-making. Although the communities and characters in the interactive storytelling were fictional, we drew heavily upon the clinical experience of our midwifery academic staff to ensure authenticity.

Students attended two, real time antenatal appointments both as the midwife and importantly for this paper, the pregnant woman- one at 12 weeks gestation the other at 36 weeks - during each of the two role-plays. In the first running of the two role-plays students conducted these appointments using Adobe Connect webinar platform (a synchronous, audio and visual, multi person interactive web based meeting space). The option to use Adobe Connect gave students the flexibility to interact face-to-face whilst not having to attend the university. Due to technical limitations however, in the second running of the role-play students were able to conduct the appointments either using Adobe Connect or physically in classrooms provided on campus. Having attended the appointments, students were tasked with completing and sharing several online activities hosted on Moodle. When playing the pregnant mother this activity included online forum chats and reflective journals. All of these activities were undertaken in character.

The data

The data used in this paper has been taken from two separate sources: the first is an audit and the second a research project.

The audit

Audit of the web based interactive storytelling took place during the first running of the web based interactive storytelling learning in the academic year 2014/15. The anonymised extracts of Moodle posts made by the students during the role-plays that appear in this paper have been taken from this audit exercise.

Audit sample

68 students took part in the web based interactive storytelling learning. All online role-play posts made during the academic years 2014/15 were analysed for the audit.

Audit design

Prior to the commencement of the interactive storytelling learning exercise, participating students were informed that their involvement in this learning activity was part of a curriculum feasibility exercise that involved audit data collection. Oral consent to use their online contributions as part of the curriculum development audit and audit dissemination via conference papers and publications was gained. The students were encouraged to be actively involved in the production of the audit documents, publications and conference presentations.

The research

The second data source used in this paper comes from a research project designed to develop a reliable and valid evaluation tool to measure acceptability of and satisfaction with this blended learning approach to preregistration midwifery education - Student Midwife Evaluation of Online Learning Effectiveness (SMEOLE). The questionnaire used is included in the [Appendix A](#) of this paper.

Sample

All the students who took part in the second running of the web based interactive storytelling learning in the academic year 2015/16 were invited to complete the education evaluation tool. To optimise the response rates, students were given time during the final lecture of the

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